



Preschool Teachers' Understanding of Children and Childhood: Rights, Responsibilities and Working with Children¹

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ABSTRACT

In this study, it was aimed to evaluate preschool teachers' understanding of childhood. The study group of this qualitative case study consisted of 51 preschool teachers working in the central districts of Ankara, who were reached by using the convenient sampling technique from the purposeful sampling method. Semi-structured interview questions were used as data collection tools. The interview questions included preschool teachers' perspectives on children and childhood, what they think about children's rights and basic requirements, their views on the advantages and difficulties of working with children, and their responsibilities towards children. The interview questions were analyzed using a content analysis approach. As a result, it is thought that preschool teachers who participated in the study have a generally positive perspective towards children and childhood. According to preschool teachers' understanding of rights and requirements, it is seen that children requirement love the most, have the right to be protected and safe, and the most important right is the right to have a mother and father. Regarding the right to participation, it was determined that children's opinions should be consulted at home, at school and in society, that children's opinions were taken into consideration in the selection of activities at school and that children's opinions were more effective in the decisions taken. According to preschool teachers' understanding of working with children, the biggest advantage of working with children is that children are natural and innocent, and the most difficult aspect is the communication problem with parents. In addition, it was determined that preschool teachers' professional responsibilities towards children are to raise children as good individuals, they feel conscientious responsibility towards children and as an adult they feel the responsibility to help all children in requirement and in difficult situations.

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INTRODUCTION

Childhood is a concept that is evaluated differently in every society, has undergone many changes from the past to the present, but a clear definition cannot be made even today. When we look at historical studies on children, it seems more possible to obtain information about childhood, which is considered as a period rather than information about the concept of child (Elkind, 1999; Heywood, 2003; Onur, 2005; Postman, 1995; Tan, 1989). When socialization processes are examined, people have gone through great changes throughout history. In this process, as childhood became a concept that adults were interested in, societies' approach to children also differed. It has been observed that studies on the concept of childhood, which has been kept separate from adulthood especially since the Middle Ages, have increased after the 20th century and the perspective on children and childhood has changed significantly (Postman, 1995; Elkind, 1999; Heywood, 2003; Archard, 2004; Sorin, 2005; Onur, 2005).

In addition to historical change, societies' approaches to childhood vary sociologically and geographically (Jenks, 2005; Mayall, 2002; Mckendrick, 2000; James & Prout, 1997). In the pre-sociological period, it is seen that the child was conceptualized as the bad or Dionysian child (Hobbes), the innocent or Apollonian child (Rousseau), the immanent (inherent) child (Locke), the naturally developing child (Piaget), the unconscious child (Freud), and childhood was viewed in this context. However, in the sociological period after the 1980s, it has been emphasized that children are active in the construction and management of their social lives and should be seen as such (Corsaro, 1997; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1999). These views, which have been dominant in the sociology of childhood for the last forty years or so, are referred to as the “new sociology of childhood” (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Prout, 2011). In the “new” sociology of childhood, children are positioned as social actors, which has led to the growth of child-focused research, the deepening of ethical approaches and the increase in innovative research methods (Swauger, Castro, & Harger, 2017). Today, the sociology of childhood goes beyond “new” sociological studies and is at a crossroads in developing the subject matter, methods and processes of research on children (Gu, 2021).

In addition to sociological studies on childhood, both the physical and psychological characteristics of the environment in which childhood is experienced are also thought to affect the understanding of childhood (Jenks, 2005). This effect is defined in the literature with the concept of “geographies of childhood” (McKendrick, 2000) as a change in the understanding of childhood depending on all conditions/context in the home environment, school environment and society. According to the bioecological model, which focuses on children's relationships with their physical and social environments, the child is at the center of all contexts, from the macrosystem, which includes social events, to the microsystem, which consists of family, school, neighborhood and peers. Children interact with society both directly and indirectly in contexts at different levels. Considering the importance of this interaction, the meanings attributed to childhood by individuals representing the systems connected to the child will significantly affect all systems in general.

When all historical, sociological and geographical factors are taken into consideration, it is concluded that societies should view childhood as a process in which the child makes sense of his/her environment through active participation. This perspective reflects the understanding of the “participatory child”. The application of participatory methods in all matters related to children is defined as the “gold standard” today (Hammersley, 2017). In our country, it will be possible to evolve our perspective on childhood towards a participatory understanding of the child by addressing the concept of childhood from a sociological and geographical perspective and describing it in detail.

It is emphasized by researchers working on this issue that the view of childhood is more in line with the nature of children when it is from a “participatory child” perspective (Avcı, 2019; Hammersley, 2017; Sorin, 2005). The progress of the understanding of childhood towards the understanding of participatory children, in which children are seen as social individuals participating in their own lives and education (Sorin, 2005; Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014) will increase the quality of services to be provided to children. Education is at the forefront of the services provided to children, and preschool is at the heart of

education. Considering the developmental stages of preschool children, it is seen that they are in a critical period and school experience is of great importance for children. The most obvious reason for the importance of school experiences is that environmental influences are not limited to the environment at home and interactions within the family (Bee, 2009). The closest witnesses of children's lives are their families, friends and teachers. At this point, based on the sociological reasons explained above, it is thought to be obvious that especially individuals perspectives on children and childhood who witness children's lives closely will directly affect their interactions with children. The importance of examining the understanding of childhood of preschool teachers working with preschool children, who are in a critical developmental period, is an undeniable fact. This is because preschool teachers are the ones who can make essential decisions for the benefit of children in line with their education and work one-on-one with children (Türker, 2023). In addition, it is frequently stated by researchers that preschool teachers' understanding of childhood is effective not only in the field of education but also in health and social service policies and practices to be provided to children (Fern, 2008; Johnny, 2006; James & Prout, 1997; Sorin, 2005; Uprichard, 2008). In the light of all these reasons, the aim of this study was determined to reveal the understanding of childhood of preschool teachers working in Ankara.

The sub-objectives of this research;

1. How teachers view children and childhood,
2. What are the basic requirements of children according to teachers,
3. What are teachers' thoughts on children's rights and children's right to participation,
4. What are the difficulties and advantages of working with children according to teachers,
5. What are the responsibilities of teachers towards children.

METHOD

Research Design

In this study, which aims to describe preschool teachers' understandings of childhood, phenomenology, one of the qualitative research designs, was used. This design is a qualitative research method that enables people to express their understanding, feelings, perspectives and perceptions about a particular phenomenon or concept and to describe how they experience this phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Glesne, 2015; Rose, Beeby & Parker, 1995; Yin, 2017).

Study Group

The participants of this study consisted of 51 preschool teachers working in the central districts of Ankara province affiliated to the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). Convenient sampling technique, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used to determine the participants. In qualitative research, situations are selected purposively and purposive sampling is the most commonly used type of non-probability sampling method (Creswell, 2014; Glesne, 2015; Merriam, 2015; Punch, 2011). Convenience sampling, which is a technique of purposive sampling method, involves the accessibility of the researchers to the participants (Glesne, 2015). Determining the number of samples also depends on the whole process, from the sources supporting the study to the questions asked in qualitative studies. The important point for determining the number of participants in purposive sampling is to consider the information about the research in the process. Sample selection according to the purpose of the study ends when no new information is obtained from the participants (Patton, 2014). In qualitative studies, it is recommended to collect data until it reaches the level of saturation and excess (Patton, 2014). In this study, when the number of teachers interviewed was 47, it was understood that data saturation was reached, and since an appointment was made, 4 More participant interviews were conducted and a total of 51 participants were reached.

Research Instruments and Processes

The research data were collected face-to-face using a semi-structured interview technique. The interview questions consisted of questions about the participating preschool teachers' views on children and childhood, their general views on children's rights and their ideas about children's right to participation, their views on children's basic requirements, their views on the benefits and challenges of working with children, and their responsibilities towards children as teachers and adults.

The first interview question, "How did you decide to work with children?" was prepared as an "ice breaker" to motivate and relax the preschool teachers participating in the interview and to expand the boundaries of communication (Chlup & Collins, 2010; Kilanowski, 2012). After the ice-breaker question, as suggested by Patton (2014), questions that would reflect the views and experiences of the participants were prioritized, and questions with more detailed comments were left to the end.

Validity/ Credibility Study

In this study, expert opinion, which is one of the validity methods in qualitative studies, was applied. In qualitative research, validity is ensured by the researcher presenting the subject he/she is investigating as objectively as possible and avoiding manipulation (Merriam, 2015). The prepared questions were sent to 13 faculty members working in different universities who have research on childhood and qualitative methodology in terms of methodology, and five experts gave feedback to the form. In line with the expert opinions, one question with a difference of opinion was removed from the interview form.

Reliability/Consistency Study

For the reliability of the study, an independent researcher who has studies on child participation and the first researcher examined the interview transcripts separately and evaluated them according to the categories determined. Then, the results of their evaluations were calculated with the formula $\text{Reliability} = \text{Consensus} / (\text{Consensus} + \text{Disagreement})$ (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and as a result, the overall reliability of the study was determined as 90% ($\text{Reliability} = 193 / (193 + 22) = 0.90 = 90\%$). In addition, the second researcher was consulted in cases where there was a difference of opinion between the evaluators. The second researcher examined the interview records and the cases where a two-thirds majority was achieved in the number of opinions were accepted.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the research data was carried out by content analysis method. Before the analysis of the data, the steps of data transcription, pre-analysis preparations and then inductive analysis were followed (Creswell, 2014; Glesne, 2015; Merriam, 2015). Data transcription was carried out by the researcher after the interviews were completed. The transcription of the records was written in the order of the interviewees, without any corrections, as they were heard, and the pages where the records were written were numbered. After the transcription of the recordings, the first researcher and an expert listened to the recordings and checked the transcripts. After the transcription of the interviews, each page was numbered, and after the numbering, all data were read and possible categories, subcategories and codes were extracted. In the process of determining the codes, it was observed that almost all of the participants' responses contained more than one code.

After the themes, categories, sub-categories and codes formed, the same process was carried out by an expert independent of the researcher, that reached a consensus were determined by comparing them. The determined themes, categories and subcategories are shown in Figure 1.

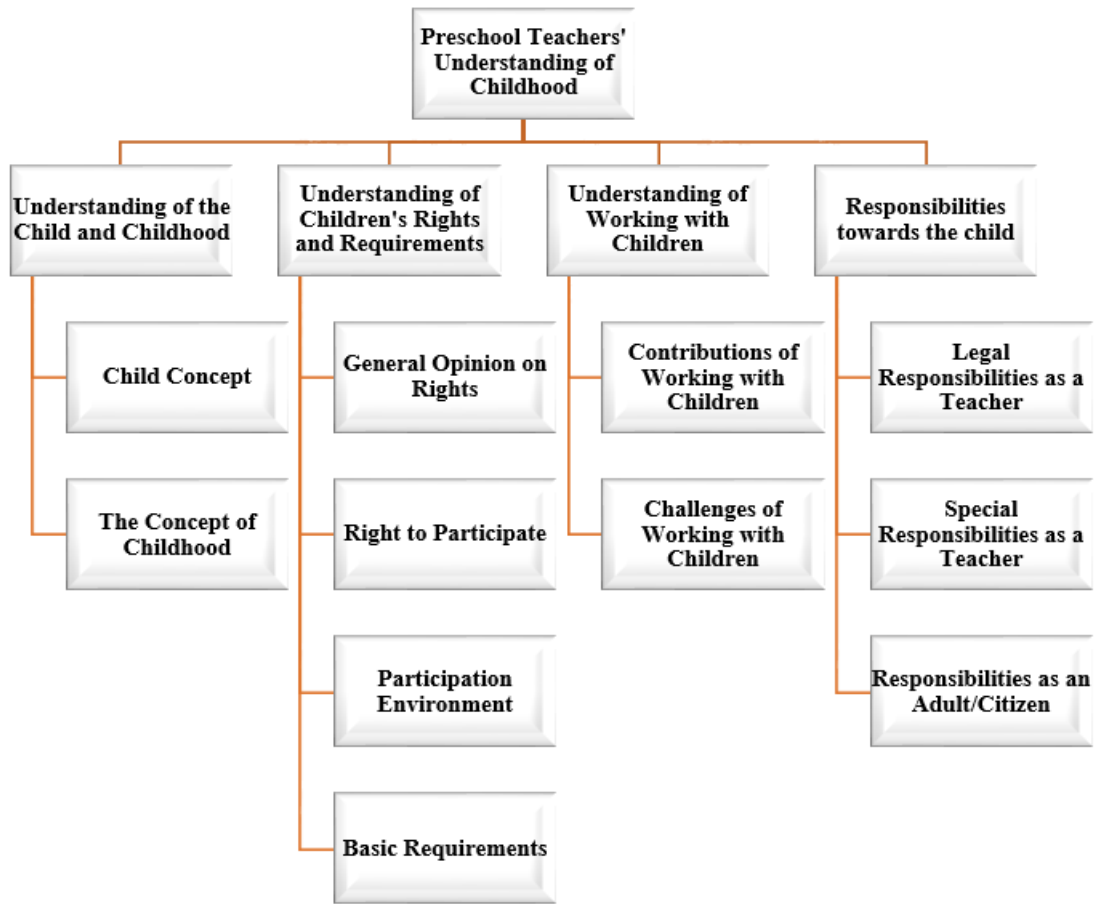


Figure 1. Themes, categories and subcategories

Ethic

Ethical principles (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were taken into consideration throughout the study. Before starting the study, legal permission was obtained from the Ministry of National Education. After the legal permission, preschool teachers' participation in the study was voluntary. A consent form was presented to the preschool teachers, assuring them that their participation was voluntary and that they could freely terminate their participation at any point in the study. In addition, the participants were informed about the research topic and their permission was obtained to make voice recordings during the interview. At the stage of transcribing the audio recordings and presenting them in the findings section, each participant was given a pseudonym in line with the principles of confidentiality (Glesne, 2015).

FINDINGS

In this study, it was aimed to reveal preschool teachers' understanding of childhood. The findings obtained from the interviews were interpreted under the themes of “Understanding of Children and Childhood, Understanding of Children's Rights and Requirements, Understanding of Working with Children and Responsibilities towards Children”. The categories and subcategories under these themes are given in Table 1. The codes created are presented in the text in the form of tables with subcategories under each category heading.

Table 1. Themes, categories and subcategories

Themes	Categories	Subcategories
Understanding of the Child and Childhood	Child Concept	Thoughts on the Nature of the Child
		Feelings about the Child's Disability
		Glorified Feelings Towards the Child
		Negative perspective of the Child
		Feelings that involve expectation

	The Concept of Childhood	Thoughts on the Nature of Childhood
		Ideas that Define Childhood as Inadequacy
		Glorified Feelings Towards the Child
		Negative Perspectives on Childhood
		Feelings about the Past
Understanding of Children's Rights and Requirements	General Opinion on Rights	Must-Have Rights
		Rights Considered Most Important
	Right to Participate	Definition of the Right to Participate
		Topics on which children's views were sought
	Participation Environment	Impact of Opinions on Decisions
		Child Participation in the Home Environment
		Child Participation in the School Environment
	Basic Requirements	Child Participation in Society
		Physiological Requirements
		Psychological Requirements
		Requirements for Knowing and Understanding the World
	Understanding of Working with Children	Contributions of Working with Children
The Child and the Contributions of Childhood		
Challenges of Working with Children		Challenges as a Teacher
		Challenges perceived to be child-related
		Environment Related Challenges
		Communication Challenges
Responsibilities towards the child	Legal Responsibilities as a Teacher	Nonexistence
		Child Related Responsibilities
		Developmental Responsibilities
	Special Responsibilities as a Teacher	Professional Responsibilities
		Educational Responsibilities
		Individual Responsibilities
		Child Related Responsibilities
	Responsibilities as an Adult/Citizen	Professional Responsibilities
		Developmental Responsibilities
		Universal Responsibilities
		Traditional/cultural Responsibilities
		Individual Responsibilities

Themes 1. Understanding of the Child and Childhood

Preschool teachers' conceptions of children and childhood were analyzed in two categories: “child concept” and “childhood concept”. Participants' views on the concept of “child” and “childhood” are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Subcategories and codes of the child and childhood concept category

Category	Subcategories	Codes
Child Concept	Thoughts on the Nature of the Child	Natural (8), Love (6), Moving (5), Creative (4), New (3), Excitement (3), Doing what comes to mind (3), Free (2), Different (1), Smile (1), Trust (1), Play (1)
	Feelings about the Child's Disability	Innocent-pure (23), Clean (7), Clean Blank slate (6), Small (6), Needy (1), Undeveloped (1)
	Glorified Feelings Towards the Child	Happy (7), Joy (5), Cute (4), Cute (3), Truthfulness (3), Kindness (2), Mercy (1), Compassion (1) Fun (1), Funny (2)
	Negative Perspectives of the Child	Noise (1), Irresponsible Families (1)
	Feelings that Involve expectation	Future (5), Beautiful Emotions (5), Past (2), Hope (1), Life (1), Individual to Grow Up Beautiful (1)
The Concept of Childhood	Thoughts on the Nature of Childhood	Play (6), Freedom (5), Curiosity (3), Research - sense of discovery (2), Trust (2), Living in the moment (2), Novelty (1), Experience (1), Naturalness (1)
	Ideas that Define Childhood as Inadequacy	Innocence (11), Cleanliness (3)
	Glorified Feelings	Cuteness (3), Friendliness (1)

Towards the Child	
Negative Perspectives on Childhood	Destruction of childhood (2), Selfishness (1), Error (1), Authority (1)
Feelings about the Past	A period of human life (19), My own childhood (7),

On the one hand, the participants defined the concept of child with expressions reflecting the nature of the child such as “*natural, love, creative...*” and on the other hand, they emphasized concepts that see the child as inadequate such as “*innocent-pure, needy, undeveloped...*”. As an example of expressions reflecting the thoughts of preschool teachers about the concept of child; Yeliz defined children as both natural and innocent with the statement “*The child is the most natural version of the human state, the most natural, that is, there is no artifice, no bad intentions, his feelings, thoughts, everything is very innocent, he is already the most beautiful thing in the world*”. Kübra responded with the statement “*...love, innocence, beauty, goodness, goodness, truthfulness, I mean, all kinds of things make me feel all warm and fuzzy inside when I hear the word 'child'*”, which includes multiple codes related to both the nature of the child and inadequate feelings towards the child. Tuba said, “*Small. Small in every personal physical aspect. The fact that he/she has not fully grown up as an adult. Small in every aspect of thought. Undeveloped.*” She stated that she saw the child as both physically and cognitively underdeveloped. As an example of the negative view of the child subcategory; Melda stated that children are actually very natural, but when she thinks of children, she thinks of noise.

The thoughts of preschool teachers about the concept of childhood; Pelin's statement “*The period in which the behaviors seen in children are experienced*”, Özlem's statement “*The most beautiful periods in human life that will never come back again*” and Esra's emphasis on “*A beautiful fun process*” can be given as examples of the subcategory of defining childhood as a period of human life. In addition, Kübra emphasized innocence in her statement “*Again, innocence, especially the sense of research and discovery, comes to my mind*”, referring to the answer she gave in the concept of “child”, but she also defined childhood as a sense of research and discovery, reflecting her belief in the nature of childhood. Şerife defined childhood with negative expressions such as mistakes and selfishness with the words “*Childhood can be a mistake, for example, it can be selfishness, self-centeredness, there can be mistakes*”.

Themes 2. Understanding of Children's Rights and Requirements

Preschool teachers' understanding of children's rights and children's basic requirements were categorized into four categories: “General Opinion on Rights”, “Right to Participate”, “Participation Environment” and “Basic requirements”.

General Opinion on Rights Category

Participants' general views on children's rights are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Rights related opinions category

Category	Subcategories	Codes
General Opinion on Rights	Must-Have Rights	Right to be safe (14), Right to have parents (10), Right to play (10), Right to education (10), Right to love (10), Right to nutrition (9), Right to health (8), Right to express oneself (7), Right to live (6), All rights (5), Right to be free (4), Right to live their childhood as children (1), Right to spend quality time with adults (1), Right to clothing (1), Right to personal care (1), Right to have their requirements met (1)
	Rights Considered Most Important	Right to have parents (10), Right to be safe (9), Right to play (9), Right to education (8), Right to express oneself (7), Right to love (7), Right to live (6), Right to respect (5), Right to health (4), Right to nutrition (3), All rights are important (3), Right to be free (2), Right to live their childhood as children (1), Right to spend quality time with adults (1), Right to clothing (1), Right to

As an example of the participants' views on the rights that children should have; Fatma mentioned a right that children should have with the statement "... they have the right to play in a beautiful and clean environment, but they do not have such a right in this environment." but emphasized that this is not possible in the environmental conditions she lives in.

Burcu said, "... they have the right to play. I feel that this right is being taken away from them. Shopping malls have entered our lives a lot. They cannot play, they cannot play. They spend time sitting. We have a curriculum. We don't want them to hold a pencil in kindergarten, we want them to play. We want more drama-oriented studies. I think this should be emphasized even in universities. They start without connecting the dots. We don't want this anymore."

In parallel to Fatma's statement, Fatma mentioned children's existing but unexercised right to play.

After the participants were asked about the rights that children should have, they were asked to say which rights they thought were the most important. The striking point here was the "right to respect", which was mentioned by 5 participants when asked what the most important rights of children are, but was not among the codes of the rights that children should have. For example, Sinem "... for example, they deserve respect...", Tuba "... to respect them..." and Zeynep "... they need to receive love and respect." emphasized that respect is among the most important rights of children.

Table 4 presents the findings comparing these two situations in which the participants were asked one after the other, first about the rights that children should have and then about the most important rights that they believe children should have.

Table 4. Comparison of the rights they should have and the most important rights

Category	Codes	Subcategories	
		The most important rights	The rights they should have
General Opinion on Rights	The right to have parents	10	10
	The right to be safe	9	14
	Right to play games	9	10
	Right to education	8	10
	The right to express oneself	7	7
	The right to love	7	10
	Right to life	6	6
	The right to respect	5	0
	Right to health	4	8
	Right to nutrition	3	9
	All rights matter	3	5
	The right to be free	2	4
	The right to live their childhood as children	1	1
	The right to quality time with adults	1	1
	Right to clothing	1	1
Right to personal care	1	1	
The right to have their requirements met	1	1	

When the findings in Table 4 are analyzed, it is determined that the code "the right to have a mother and a father" is equally common in both cases. In addition, it was wondered whether this equal number of codes was uttered by the same participants or by different participants, so the data were analyzed. As a result of the analysis, it was determined that the same participants mentioned the code "the right to have parents" in

both cases. The same is true for the codes “Right to express oneself”, “Right to live”, “Right to live their childhood as a child”, “Right to spend quality time with adults”, “Right to clothing”, “Right to have their requirements met” and “Right to personal care”. These codes were mentioned by the same participants in equal numbers in both cases.

While the right to be safe was mentioned by 14 participants for the rights that children should have, it was emphasized by 9 participants for the most important rights. Similarly, the codes “Right to play”, “Right to education”, “Right to love”, “Right to health”, “Right to nutrition”, “Right to be free” and “All rights are important” were mentioned less by the participants in the most important rights subcategory.

Right to Participate Category

Preschool teachers' responses regarding the right to participation are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Subcategories and codes for the right to participate category

Category.	Subcategories	Codes
Right to Participate	Definition of the Right to Participate	Children having a say (34), Participation in everything (10), Participation in the educational environment (5), Participation in games (2), Going to the theater (1), Participation in establishing order (1), Not forcing children to participate in anything (1)
	Topics on which children's views were sought	In choosing the type of activity (26), In establishing classroom rules (11), In the problem solving process (9), In changing the location of centers/toys (9), In free time activities (6), In choosing materials in activities (4), In nutrition (2), In choosing games (2), In choosing songs (2), About everything (2), In determining the duration of the activity (2), In choosing the guard (1), In choosing friends (1)
	Impact of Opinions on Decisions	The child's opinion is effective (22), Joint decision is taken (13), The teacher's opinion is effective (9), Opinions in accordance with the classroom organization are effective (6), The opinions of the majority are effective (2)

As examples of the participants' thoughts on the definition of the right to participation; Pelin “... *having a say in situations where she will make her own decision.*”, Hilal “... *having a say in matters that concern her.*” and Selin “... *having a say in matters that concern them*” can be given as examples of the participants' explanations that giving children the right to have a say in matters that concern them is the right to participation.

In addition, the participants were asked what kind of situations they consulted children's opinions at school. When the responses of the participants were examined, Fatma gave an example of these situations as follows; “*I sometimes ask them in activity choices. I ask their opinions in feedings. I ask them which game to play about the activity. I ask their opinions about classroom rules. I get their opinions about solutions in case of problems. I get children's opinions about the locations of our centers. In center changes, if it is appropriate, the children say.*” Elif said, “*In every situation. I offer options. I also set limits, of course, I don't say let's do whatever you want. I give options. If the options are more or less equal, then whoever wants what, I separate the tables, I give it that way. Then it is even more beautiful.*” Elif said that she consulted the opinions of the children on every subject, but she did this by setting limits and offering options.

In the interviews, the participants were asked to what extent the opinions of the children were influential in the decisions they would make, and Didem gave some examples of remarkable statements in line with the answers given; “... *what the children say is dominant in the decisions I make. Because if it is not dominant, I cannot give them what I want. I also have my own authority, but when they have what they want, when I say I did what you wanted, okay, but now do what I want, they do it happily.*” Didem explained that the opinions of the children are dominant, but she has an authority and she attaches importance to the opinions of the children in order to get them to do what she wants. As an example of the opinions indicating that they make joint decisions with the children; Sevda stated that “... *the effect is like this: I have to do what I say and they have to do what they say. I want there to be an equal and fair environment in the classroom. How will this always happen? It will be by giving importance to children's ideas. But since they are young,*

they cannot decide everything. I am also an individual in the class. I want them to know my opinions as well...” with the answer that she cares about the opinions of the children, but her own opinions are also important. As an example of the participants who stated that their opinions were more effective than the opinions of the children in the decisions taken; Ebru stated that she was more effective by giving a degree with the answer “... let's say 40% because if we leave them completely during the day, they may want to play house all day. As an example of the statements of those who stated that children's opinions are effective in decisions that will not disrupt the order of their classrooms; Seda stated “... I leave children free if it will not affect other children. I mean, if what one child wants is done, the balance of the class will be disrupted. It takes us how many months to establish that balance anyway.” As an example of the participants who emphasized that the decisions of the majority would be more effective; Şerife expressed this view as follows: “... it actually depends on gender. Boys want moving games, girls want housekeeping. Since there are a lot of boys in my class, what boys say happens more often.”

Participation Environment Category

Preschool teachers' opinions about the participation environment are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Subcategories and codes for the participation environment category

Category	Subcategories	Codes
Participation Environment	Child Participation in the Home Environment	Asking his/her opinion on issues related to the home (22), Asking his/her opinion on issues related to the child (8), Giving responsibility for issues related to the home (8), Listening to his/her feelings and thoughts (7), Organizing activities with family members (3), Family seeing children as individuals (3), Family understanding the child (2), Ensuring that the child is free (2), Raising awareness of the family on this issue (2)
	Child Participation in the School Environment	Taking their opinions while doing activities (33), Creating environments where they can express themselves at school (8), Not forcing the child to participate (3), Preparing activities for children (3), Ensuring their participation in everything in the classroom (2), Not discriminating (1), Ensuring a peaceful environment in the classroom (1), Ensuring that they make friends with whomever they want (1), Providing alternatives (1)
	Child Participation in Society	Taking children's opinions in decisions related to children (19), Increasing activities for children (12), Activating children (6), Creating child-friendly environments (3), Preventing physical and psychological violence (2), Conducting family trainings (2), Valuing children (1), Having environments where they can defend their rights according to their age groups (1), Getting help from non-governmental organizations (1), Ensuring that children can enter and exit every area (1)

For example, Didem said, “Children's opinions should be taken into consideration at home as well. I want children to participate in all the decisions I make. For example, when my children were young, they witnessed some events. I would say, “Come, son, let's tell you about it.” Sometimes very good ideas can come out. Children can also come up with things that you never expect from them...” and stated that children's participation can be ensured by taking their opinions on issues related to the home. Kübra said, “At home, especially in matters related to the child, for example, when buying a piece of clothing, you can convince the child if you put him/her in the place of a big man and give importance to him/her. You can convince him if you ask the child's opinion when you say, “I want to buy clothes for you.” With this statement, she emphasized the importance of consulting children's opinions on issues related to the child, and as an example of this situation, she said that the child's opinion should be asked when choosing clothes for the child. Sema said, “I guess I don't pay much attention to my own child at home. When they reach puberty and start shouting, maybe you think that they are an individual and give them the right to speak. I don't pay attention to my own child at home. Even when buying something, they should be asked.” She emphasized that the child's opinion can be consulted when buying something at home.

As an example of the participants who defined participation in the school environment as taking

children's opinions while doing activities; Didem said, *"For example, in activities, I ask questions such as "Children, should we do this like this? How would you like it more if we did it like this? I get different answers from them."* Didem stated that she asked children questions about how they wanted the activities to be and Tuğçe said, *"... their opinions should be taken in the activities to be done. When we get their ideas, we have already ensured their participation."* In parallel with the previous opinion, Tuğçe stated that she consulted children's opinions in activities. As an example for the code of providing environments where children can express themselves at school; Özlem stated *"Participation can be ensured by creating environments where children can express themselves at school."*, Berrin stated *"... to ensure that they can express themselves in a good education, in a healthy environment offered to them. Ensuring that they are in good communication."* Berrin mentioned the importance of providing appropriate environments for participation. In addition, as an example of another striking response, Gökçe said, *"When we are doing an activity here, if the child does not want to do it, we do not have to involve them. He is a child, we cannot put him under pressure."* Gökçe stated that participation in the school environment means not forcing the child to participate in an activity that he does not want to do.

As an example of the participants' views on how children's participation can be ensured in the society; Kübra said, *"As I said in the society, children's opinions should also be taken into consideration. I think their opinions should be taken into consideration when making decisions about them. When we make decisions about the class, we make them together. That is also a social decision. After all, we live collectively at school."* Burcu stated that children's opinions should be taken into consideration in the society, especially in decisions related to children, that she pays attention to this in the classroom and that the classroom is also a society. Burcu said, *"In the society, it is necessary to ensure that children's opinions are taken in everything that is done for children. I mean, we try to instill this in both parents and children."* Burcu stated that children's opinions should be taken in everything done for children in society.

Participants Ayşe and Senem explained that children's opinions should be consulted in decisions related to children with the example of playgrounds. Ayşe said, *"If children are going to play in that area in the community, in the parks, if I had such authority, I would create a council where all children would gather. I would ask them what they want to happen."* Ayşe stated that children's opinions could be consulted for playgrounds by establishing children's assemblies.

Senem said, "Local governments in the community can gather children and families to get their opinions. For example, they built a playground next to us. The best example is the playground, but they didn't do it in consultation with children and teachers. However, before those equipment arrived, children were running there more freely. They were playing soccer. They brought two or three plastic devices, come on, the children don't like doing the same thing after two or three slides. They should consult, I mean, in the landscaping they will do. Maybe the child will say, "I want an area where I want to run freely."

With his response, he stated that local governments should not only take the opinions of children into consideration when building playgrounds, but also the opinions of parents and teachers should be taken into consideration.

Basic Requirements Category

Participants' opinions on the basic requirements of children are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Subcategories and codes for the basic requirements category

Category	Subcategories	Codes
Basic Requirements	Physiological Requirements	Nutrition (12), Health (2), Dressing (2), Meeting self-care requirements (4), Shelter (4)
	Psychological Requirements	Love (44), Trust (12), Care (11), Family (9), Seeing children as individuals (3), Understanding children (3), Valuing children (3), Preparing an environment where children will be happy (2), Freedom (1)
	Requirements for Knowing and	Play (5), Education (5), Supporting their development (2), Being in a social environment (1), Satisfying their curiosity (1)

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While explaining their views on the basic requirements of children, preschool teachers stated that children requirement “love” the most. As examples of the participants' thoughts on love; Pelin “...*children need love the most...*”, Hilal “...*love because when you teach something with love, they understand it better and I have seen in my 16 years of professional life that you can be successful in many things in this way...*”, Gökçe “...”, Gökçe “... *Love is the greatest basic requirement, love is the greatest basic requirement, a child wants love even if he/she is hungry or has torn clothes...*”, and Senem stated that “... *children are nourished with love, children grow with love, you give food, but when you give that food to that child, don't expect him/her to grow, but when you approach him/her with love, I think the child develops better...*”.

Of the 51 preschool teachers who participated in the study, 44 emphasized that the most basic requirement is love and that other requirements cannot be met without love. They also stated that the education given with love is more beneficial, that the child will want love first and foremost, and that love should be given not only to preschool children but also to children of all ages.

Other views that were emphasized were on nutrition, trust, care and family. The participants who expressed these views stated that nutrition, trust, care or family alone are not sufficient requirements, and that other requirements should also be included. For example, Özlem stated that “... *love is the most basic requirement, followed by nutrition...*” and that nutrition comes after love, while Zeliha stated that nutrition, love and trust are equally important with the statement “... *nutrition... then love is also very important and it is very important that they are safe...*”.

Themes 3. Understanding of Working with Children

Preschool teachers' understanding of working with children was analyzed in two categories: “Contributions of Working with Children” and “Challenges of Working with Children”. Preschool teachers' opinions on the contributions of working with children and challenges of working with children are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Subcategories and codes for the category of contributions of working with children

Category	Subcategories	Codes
Benefits of Working with Children	Personal Topics	To be rewarded for the effort (12), To always remain a child (8), To stay young (8), To always be energetic (8), To get away from troubles (7), To think positively (7), To have a comfortable classroom environment like home (3), To benefit my own child (2), To be patient
	The Child and the Contributions of Childhood	Children being natural and innocent (16), Having ease of communication with children (5), Having a lot to learn from children (2), Children being creative (2)
Challenges of Working with Children	Challenges as a Teacher	Need to be energetic and healthy at all times (5), It becomes more difficult as the age of the teacher increases (4)
	Challenges perceived to be child-related	Demanding constant attention and care (11), Having children with special requirements (2), Children's negative behaviors (2), Small age group (2)
	Environment Related Challenges	Too crowded classroom (5), Lack of auxiliary personnel (4), Ensuring the safety of the child (3), Too much noise (2), Having different age groups in the same classroom (2)
	Communication Challenges	Communication with families (18), Communication with children (7)
	Nonexistence	I have no difficulty (3)

It was found noteworthy that the participants especially emphasized the innocence of children and the reward for their efforts. As an example of these situations; Fatma stated “...*it is very nice to be among them. They are very natural and very innocent.*” and Özlem said, “...*first of all, they are natural. They have no ulterior motives.*” They attributed the contributions of working with children to the positive

characteristics of children, which they characterized as innocent and natural. Ayşe said, *“Working with children is very enjoyable, incredibly enjoyable. I think we are the luckiest group among the teachers. You have people who are clean, their emotions are clean, they are clean, innocent, innocent inside and out. If they like you, they say they love you, if they don't like you, they say they don't like you. For example, my student says that he got sick today. He says I don't love you. I said my love is enough for both of us. You can see love, beauty, hate and everything very clearly in children.”* She explained that working with children is very enjoyable and that preschool teachers are the luckiest group among teachers by emphasizing the positive characteristics of children. Didem said, *“One of the most beautiful things about working with children is that you stay young. You never grow up. Their actions make you happy and you stay young. Whether you are 50 or 60, it is like this...”* They stated the advantages of staying young.

For example, Özlem said, *“There is no difficulty in working with children. The only difficulty is their parents. For example, a problem that we can solve with the children gets very complicated when the family is involved.”* Özlem stated that children have difficulties with their parents and that they cannot solve a problem when the family is involved when they can solve it with the child. Didem said, *“It is a very difficult profession. It is a more difficult profession than classroom teaching. You can't leave it for a moment, you can't let it go. You don't know what you will encounter the moment you leave it. Therefore, it is a profession that requires constant attention and care.”* Didem emphasized that working with children, especially preschool children, is difficult, that it is necessary to be constantly careful and that children always demand attention. Ebru said, *“As I said, sometimes it can be very tiring and exhausting. As in other branches, it is not possible to say, “Let me read this for 5 minutes, let me write what is on the board in the notebook, or let me do this or that, I will come and do it. Always be good. You have to be healthy and dynamic. This is the disadvantage.”* She attributed the difficulty of working with children to the fact that preschool teachers should always be healthy and energetic and should work without taking a break. Pinar said, *“There is a lack of auxiliary staff in our classrooms. Preschool teachers are not given importance. In special education classes, there is one helper each. Okay, their job is not easy, but every child requirements special attention. In kindergartens, there should be at least two teachers in each class.”* Pinar made a comparison between preschool classrooms and special education classrooms and stated that she thinks that every child requirements special attention and therefore, two teachers are needed in preschool classrooms as in special education classrooms.

Themes 4. Responsibilities towards Children

The thoughts of preschool teachers about their responsibilities towards children were presented in three categories: “legal responsibilities as a teacher”, “special responsibilities as a teacher” and “responsibilities as an adult/citizen”. These categories are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Subcategories and codes for the legal responsibilities as a teacher category

Category	Subcategories	Codes
Legal Responsibilities as a Teacher	Child Related Responsibilities	Raising children as good individuals (12), Ensuring children's safety (7),
		Being a good example for children (7), Making children love school (6),
		Giving love (3), Making children happy (2), Not harming children's personalities (2), Acting justly (1), Establishing authority over children (1)
	Developmental Responsibilities	Working on developmental areas (9), Developing prosocial behaviors (7), Preparing children for primary school (4), Developing children's ability to express themselves (2), Respecting children (2), Giving children responsibility (1),
Professional Responsibilities	Paying attention to clothing and being well-groomed (2), Deserving the money received (1), Being friendly (1), Improving oneself (3), Cooperating with the school administration (1),	
Educational Responsibilities	To be able to provide training (4), To ensure the participation of parents (1), To ensure that the training period is productive (1),	

Special Responsibilities as a Teacher	Individual Responsibilities	Feeling conscientiously responsible (21), Taking the place of one's own child (10), Not being bound by legal responsibility (2)
	Child Related Responsibilities	Showing love (8), Ensuring children's safety (7), Setting a good example for children (2), Acting compassionately (1), Not discriminating (1)
	Professional Responsibilities	To deserve the money received (1), To do one's job with love (1)
	Developmental Responsibilities	Helping with self-care (3), Supporting children's social-emotional Development(2)
Responsibilities as an Adult/Citizen	Universal Responsibilities	Helping children in need and in difficult situations (21), Ensuring equality in education (6), Using resources efficiently (5), Leaving a livable world (3), Being a good example in society (12),
	Traditional/cultural Responsibilities	Transferring traditions and customs to children (2), Providing moral support (1)
	Individual Responsibilities	Improving oneself (1), I don't feel much responsibility (1)

As an example of the legal responsibilities that preschool teachers feel as a teacher towards children;

Didem said, *"We are the foundation of the building. Unless the foundation is solid, that building will surely shake. My aim is not to get children to do line work, writing or anything else. My only goal is to raise children as good individuals. Because children learn to read and write in the first grade, but they learn love, respect, order and tidiness in kindergarten in order to be a good individual."*

In her response, she emphasized that preschool is very important and that her aim as a preschool teacher is not to make children do academic studies but to raise them as good individuals. She also stated that children can always learn academic skills such as reading and writing, but they can only learn love and respect to be a good individual in preschool. In another remarkable example, Fatma asked, *"Did I educate? Am I enough? Do I give love? Do I act justly? Do I appeal to their developmental areas? Do I make them love school? Can I do things that increase their awareness in order to become self-confident, honest, open to communication, curious to learn, healthy individuals who love their homeland and nation?"* In her statement, the participant stated that it is her professional responsibility to educate children, give them love, treat them fairly, work on their developmental areas, make them love school and raise healthy individuals. Gözde said, *"I think it is to ensure their safety. Every parent at the school, even the parents who are preschool teachers, come here with uneasiness. For example, there are children with temper. It is up to us to organize children's communication and relations with them. I think it is our biggest duty to make sure that the child likes this place and feels safe."* Gözde stated that parents are worried about their children's safety and therefore, as a teacher, her responsibility towards children is to ensure their safety.

Participants were asked whether they feel a special responsibility towards children other than the responsibilities determined by laws and regulations, and if so, what these responsibilities are. Regarding this situation, Sema said, *"Of course you feel it. For example, when I go home in the evening, I think, that child was crying there and you cut paper for the activity. What happened when you cut paper? If you had taken care of that child, if you had listened to his/her problems, I think about these things more. Sometimes I feel something conscientious even if I can't do it."* İpek said, *"Of course, I mean, the laws can be restrictive sometimes. Of course we obey them. After all, we are teachers of the state. They are applied, but sometimes there are situations where you can go beyond this. That's why I do my responsibilities according to my own conscience."* İpek emphasized that they felt conscientious responsibility towards children and that they obeyed the laws and regulations, but their behavior towards children in the classroom environment was related to their conscience. Sinem said, *"To be honest, the laws do not bind me much. I act according to the mental state of the child that day. When I start a plan, I don't necessarily say I will finish it. I don't want to finish the activities that children really suffer. I see that they are not interested, I stop. I don't find the laws and regulations very applicable anyway."* With her response, she said that she did not adhere to legal responsibilities, acted according to the mental state of the children that day, and did not force an activity that

the child did not want.

As an example of preschool teachers' views on their responsibilities as an adult/citizen, İpek said, *“Of course. Especially street children, traumatized children, peer bullied children or children who do. Anyway, it looks like I will definitely work for UNICEF in the future. I have sensitivity towards them. I am also sensitive to the children of martyrs and veterans. I am sensitive to the children of soldiers.”* With this response, she stated that as an adult, she was sensitive to children in difficult situations in the society and that she even considered working in non-governmental organizations with this sense of responsibility.

Sinem said, *“I feel it, but if you ask what I do, I don't do anything visible. But like everyone else, if a mother beats her child, I intervene. Or if a tiny child is begging without slippers, I try to do something. If someone is begging with a child on their lap, I give it to them. I don't look for the problem, but if I come across it, I try to intervene.”*

She said that he felt responsible but could not intervene much. However, she explained with examples that when she sees a child in a difficult situation, she is not indifferent and tries to do something. Senem emphasized that as an adult, she felt a sense of responsibility towards children and especially wanted to support children in hospitals with the words *“I feel it. For example, I want to retire, there are children with cancer in hospitals, I want to go there every day and give free lessons for an hour or two hours. This is my whole thought in my head.”* Pelin said, *“The world does not only belong to us. It is necessary to set a good example in society for the next generation. I feel responsible for using resources efficiently.”* Pelin emphasized that it is necessary to set a good example and use resources efficiently for the next generation. Tuba also said, *“Yes, especially as a thing, nature and future shortage. Planting trees, irrigation, resources for life”* and mentioned the importance of using resources efficiently.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, which aims to determine preschool teachers' understanding of childhood, the results were analyzed under four themes: understanding of children and childhood, understanding of children's rights and requirements, understanding of working with children, and responsibilities towards children. In this section, the opinions on the results in the light of the information and research obtained through the literature review are interpreted under the headings of each theme.

Understanding of the Child and Childhood

It is considered important to reveal individuals' understanding of children and childhood. This situation has a critical place among childhood studies as it will contribute to the field of education as well as sociological studies (Gu, 2021; Prout, 2011; Swauger, Castro, & Harger, 2017; Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014), which are frequently encountered in the literature on children and childhood. In this study, it was observed that the participants defined the concepts of child and childhood with concepts such as innocent/innocence, pure/purity, clean/clean, small and needy. Seeing children as innocent may indicate that they are perceived as inadequate, in requirement of protection, dependent and as a blank slate waiting to be filled by adults (Haring, Sorin, & Caltabiano, 2019; Sorin, 2005). In addition, the expression “a clean blank slate” was also among the participants' responses. When the studies on the understanding of childhood are examined; in the findings of the studies conducted by Avcı et al. (2014) and Erdiller-Yatmaz, Erdemir, and Erbil (2018) with pre-service teachers and Balasar (2019) with adults, it is seen that the participants used expressions such as needy, innocent, and pure while defining the whole childhood period. In the study of Avcı et al. (2014), pre-service teachers stated that they saw children as individuals who could not think maturely and could not realize their social roles. In the study of Erdiller-Yatmaz et al. (2018), it was seen that the thoughts of pre-service teachers about the child and childhood were in the direction of a passive and passive understanding of the child who is outside the adult world, inadequate, undeveloped, in need of guidance. It can be thought that the teachers in our study defined childhood as a pure, innocent, blank page and that they have an innocent child understanding in this respect. This situation brings to mind the idea that teachers may see children not only developmentally but also sociologically as active subjects of their own

lives but also as inadequate beings who need the support of adults. Kennedy (2009) emphasizes that the innocence of childhood is rich in emotionality but limits children's learning and development. He suggests that children should have experiences in which they can make choices. In addition, she says that it is important to remember that such experiences are linked to children becoming active participants in their communities. On the other hand, teachers' views such as "natural, loving, active, creative...", which reflect the nature of the child and therefore may reflect the participatory understanding of the child, were found to be pleasing. The participatory understanding of the child is an understanding that has come to the forefront in recent years and has taken place in practices. In this understanding, children's opinions are given importance and children are given the same decision-making power as adults (Corsaro, 1997; Sorin, 2005).

After "Innocence", the participants also defined childhood as "a period" and "a process". It is not surprising that it is defined as a period in human life, because the emergence of the concept of childhood in modern society began with the view of childhood as a special period (Heywood, 2003; Holt, 2000; Sorin, 2005). Another noteworthy view is that childhood is seen as the beginning of growing up. This view of the participants confirms Sorin's (2005) image of children as adults in education, which defines the understanding of childhood as practicing for adulthood. In addition, Erikson, Piaget and Freud's developmental theories support this image. According to these theories, children reach adulthood by climbing the steps of competence. It is possible to reach many contents related to Erikson's, Piaget's and Freud's developmental theories in the scope of the courses that preschool teachers graduating from the Faculties of Education take in their undergraduate education. In particular, the fact that childhood is seen as the beginning of growing up brings to mind the idea that the participants adopted the views of developmental theorists during their undergraduate education. In fact, not only in educational institutions but also in society, children are viewed not in terms of what their lives are like today, what their requirements and wishes are now, but in terms of what kind of adults they will be tomorrow (Corsaro, 1997).

Understanding of Children's Rights and Requirements

The theme of understanding children's rights and requirements was analyzed in four categories: general views on rights, right to participation, participation environments and basic requirements. In the category of general views on rights, participants emphasized the right to protection and safety the most in their views on the rights that children should have. Protection rights are the rights that ensure that the child is protected against all kinds of neglect, abuse and exploitation. It was not a surprising result that preschool teachers, who frequently referred to the innocent, pure and needy state of children in the section on

understanding children and childhood, drew attention to the right to protection the most in terms of children's rights. Sorin and Torzillo (2017), while describing adults' images of children, state that the image of the innocent child is linked to adults' instinct to protect. They even attribute the dominance of soft-touch and fenced, protected play environments in toys and play environments to this understanding. In addition to the right to be safe and protected, teachers also mentioned the rights to play, to be educated, to have parents and to be loved. These views cover a part of the rights to life and development in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC, 1995). In addition, the right to "express oneself", another right mentioned by the participants, is included in the participation rights in the convention.

The situation emphasized by the preschool teachers participating in the study as "self-expression" in the rights that children should have reflects a part of the definition of the right to participation as mentioned above. The right to participation is defined as a universal expression that includes children's freedom of expression, being listened to and having their views taken into account (Akyüz, 2012; UN CRC, 2009; Lansdown, 2005). When the answers of preschool teachers about the definition of the right to participation are analyzed, it is seen that a significant portion of them express the right to participation as the child's right to have a say. In another study in which preschool teachers' views on children's right to participation were taken, in parallel with this result, preschool teachers defined children's right to participation as children expressing their opinions freely (Kozikoğlu, 2018). These results firstly suggest that the participants may have knowledge about the child's right to participation in both national and international legal texts (UN

CRC, 1995; UN CRC, 2009). However, practices related to child participation require a consciousness that goes beyond knowing that the child has the right to speak. The child's right to speak should include issues that concern him/her. This is explained in Article 12 of the CRC as the right of the child to freely express his/her views on all matters affecting him/her and that these views should be taken into account by adults. In addition, Bae (2010), in his study on the applicability of children's participation rights in pre-school education institutions, provides evidence that children between the ages of one and five have the capacity to express themselves and have a significant impact on the issues that concern them in their daily lives. Children's participation gains meaning when they are allowed to express their views, when their views are supported and when their views are taken into account by adults (Lansdown, 2005). In this respect, evaluating the findings of preschool teachers about the issues on which they consulted children's opinions and the impact of these opinions on decisions may clarify the applicability of their understanding of children's right to participation in the eyes of preschool teachers who participated in this study.

In the responses regarding the issues on which children's opinions were sought, it is seen that their opinions were mostly sought regarding the selection of the type of activity. Other noteworthy statements of the participants reflecting participation were that they sought children's opinions in the problem-solving process, in establishing classroom rules, in the selection of materials for activities, and in changing the location of centers/toys. In the study, preschool teachers' responses about ensuring children's participation were positive and in the expected direction. However, the fact that some participants stated that they implemented the decisions of the majority in the classroom in terms of the effect of opinions on decisions suggests that not all children may have the right to participate. In particular, a teacher in the study stated that since the majority of the children in her class were boys, the games preferred by boys were played, which confirms this view. Taking the opinions of the majority does not reflect its inclusive nature. In Koran and Avci's (2017) study, findings supporting this idea stand out. It is emphasized that preschool teachers' classroom practices are more traditional and anti-participatory behaviors. This suggests that the participants' verbal statements and classroom practices may not be in the same direction. Likewise, in Le-van and Iakshina's (2021) study, it was stated that despite the teachers' statements about the importance of the participatory approach, it was not actually implemented. How the right to participation is handled in classroom practices is a controversial issue. In the study conducted by Bae (2010), it was also revealed that there were differences in practices, and it was stated that such incompatibilities between practice and laws put children's rights to express their views at risk. Looking at participation in the classroom through the eyes of children, in the study conducted by Zorbay-Varol (2019) examining children's participation in preschool education institutions, children stated that teachers determine the activities implemented in the classroom. This situation reinforces the view that classroom practices can be different with verbal expressions.

Problems related to the understanding of participation are mostly experienced in the influence of children's views on the decisions to be taken. In the findings, it is understood that teachers emphasized the statement that "the child's opinion is effective" more in the decisions to be taken. In Einarsdottir's (2005) study, it was found that children did not express themselves, participated by sitting still and did not prefer activities where only adults were active. According to the understanding of the citizen child, it is essential that not only the opinions of children or only adults are effective, but that joint decisions are taken (Öztan, 2011). The highest level of Hart's (1992) stages of participation also supports this view. It is critical to ensure the balance between adults and children in making joint decisions. Ghirotto and Mazzoni (2013) emphasize that education starts with the potential of the child, but the development of these abilities depends on the adult's ability to be an active listener. It is thought that it is important to ensure that teachers benefit from the cue of being an active listener at the point of achieving the mentioned balance.

Children's participation is made possible by taking their views on issues that concern them and creating various environments where they can express themselves (Venninen and Leinonen 2013). In order to ensure participation as a whole, these opportunities need to be created at home, at school and in the community (Hodgin & Newell, 2002). First of all, regarding participation in the home environment, preschool teachers stated that children's participation can be ensured by "asking their opinions on home-

related issues". In the research findings, it is seen in the examples of preschool teachers that children's opinions can be asked on issues related to house rules in general. The participants who thought that children's opinions should be consulted in situations related to the child in the home environment explained these ideas with examples such as buying clothes for the child and said that they attach importance to children's opinions. A patriarchal structure is observed in family life in our country. When this structure is considered in the home environment, it reflects the situation in which the adult and authority figure in the home makes decisions about household issues (Kuyurtar, 2006). The fact that teachers are mostly concerned with issues such as choosing one's own clothes, which are not among the most important things in household decisions, can be seen as natural for preschool teachers who have grown up and live in this traditional system. The fact that they expressed an opinion in favor of children's participation in decision-making processes can be explained by the fact that they are more familiar with the requirements and nature of children.

When the findings on children's participation in the school environment are examined, it can be said that children's participation includes dimensions such as taking their opinions in activities and making participation voluntary. In Zorbay-Varol's (2019) observational study on child participation practices in preschool classrooms, it was determined that children did not participate in the classroom in matters such as activity selection, deciding on the content of the activity, and initiating activities. At this point, it is thought that this study, which is based on teacher opinions, and Zorbay-Varol's (2019) study, which is based on observing one-to-one practices, are not similar, and that the difference in these studies is due to the discrepancy between discourse and practice. Akyol's (2020) study, which was also a recent study using the interview technique with children, confirms our view that children participate in the decision-making process in the classroom in a limited way and that children's participation is supported to a limited extent. In the participatory understanding of children, children's opinions are valued and adults and children are given equal decision-making power (Sorin, 2005). In this framework, not only teachers' opinions but also children's statements should be listened to. Getting opinions from all parties involved in participation is an important outcome of the accountability aspect of participation. Furthermore, the Committee on the Rights of the Child draws attention to the issue of ensuring children's active participation in school life in Article 12 of the Convention (UN CRC, 1995).

Regarding children's participation in society, the participants stated that they were in favor of "taking children's opinions in decisions related to children" not only at home and at school, but everywhere. The Convention on the Rights of the Child also supports the participation of children in all areas of society and their ability to express their views (UN CRC, 1995). Participants emphasized that children's views should be taken especially about playgrounds for areas in society where children can participate. In the declaration on the right to play adopted by the International Children's Right to Play Association, society's "indifference to the right to play" is characterized as dangerous trends and a negative impact on children's development (Hodgkin & Newell, 2002). Another view of the participants on child participation in society was to increase activities for children and to make children active. Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the child's right to rest, leisure, play and age-appropriate entertainment/activities and to participate freely in cultural and artistic life. The same article emphasizes that States Parties should promote the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities in this regard (UN CRC, 1995). However, in General Comment No. 17, which was reported at the meeting held in 2013, it was emphasized that there is concern that children are not sufficiently recognized the rights in Article 31 (UN CRC, 2013). In a study on the problems faced by children in the implementation of children's rights, it was revealed that children had the most problems about play and entertainment (Ersoy, 2011). Similarly, in Serbest's (2015) study, children stated that they could not use their rights to play, rest and free time. However, the right to participate in play-entertainment activities is one of the most fundamental rights and requirements of children. More resources and care are needed for children to participate in age-appropriate activities in society and for all children to benefit equally from these rights (Hodgkin & Newell, 2002). At this point, it is very important for the state to provide incentives in all necessary situations and areas and to take care of all children.

The basis of national and international children's rights is the fulfillment of children's requirements,

which are necessary for a good life and are more universal than rights. The basic requirements of children should be different from classical need theories. Because in the most important years of life, the priority order of their requirements may change. Children's physiological (sleep, nutrition, toileting, etc.), psychological (love, trust, etc.) and world recognition and understanding (exploration, play, etc.) requirements are among their primary requirements and are of great importance for their optimal development in all areas. Children whose requirements for love and affection are not adequately met may experience developmental problems. Neuroscience studies emphasize that children are open to development and learning when they feel safe and happy (Cozolino, 2014; Masterson, 2013; Van der Kolk, 2020). The fact that the participants emphasized psychological requirements such as love and trust at the top of children's requirements in the 21st century can be considered as a pleasing finding as it suggests their awareness of the importance of meeting children's psychological requirements (Woodhead, 2004). After "love", preschool teachers think that children's most basic requirements are nutrition, trust, attention and family. Meeting the basic requirement for nutrition provides physical satisfaction. Meeting psychological requirements such as love, attention and belonging, which are mostly behaviors and whose amount cannot be defined, is also very important for the best interests of the child (Sunal, 2009). The most basic requirements of all children are good nutrition, healthy care and a loving family environment. These three basic requirements must be met together for children to survive (Oktay, 1991).

Understanding of Working with Children

The preschool teachers who participated in the study were curious about their understanding of working with children, and the participants' responses were analyzed under the theme of understanding of working with children in the categories of contributions of working with children and challenges of working with children. First of all, in the contributions of working with children, the participants especially emphasized the innocence of children and that they were rewarded for their efforts. It is not surprising that the participants' views on the innocence of children are reflected here. Considering the connection between children's innocence and their perceived inadequacy mentioned earlier, this perspective suggests that it may reflect an overprotective understanding of teaching and low expectations related to children's inadequacy.

When the other results are examined, it is seen that preschool teachers say that they always feel like children by working with children, that they do not age, that they remain young, and that they are in a luckier group among teachers compared to other branches. According to these results, it is thought that preschool teachers who participated in the study achieved professional satisfaction. The fact that preschool teachers do their profession willingly and lovingly is considered very valuable for both children and themselves. This situation is defined as "Occupational Satisfaction" which includes the pleasurable and positive feelings that occur when a person thinks about his/her profession (Çek, 2011). This literature information strengthens the idea that teachers experience professional satisfaction.

Participants stated that working with children has challenges as well as benefits. Preschool teachers reported that they had the most difficulties in communicating with parents. Explaining the reasons for their difficulties in communication, they stated that their profession is not respected and that parents only see them as personnel who care for their children. Lack of respect for their profession is an issue frequently emphasized by teachers in studies conducted with preschool teachers (Başturan & Görgü, 2020; Demir & Arı, 2013; Moloney, 2010). Although the years of the research differed, it is seen that there is no change in preschool teachers' views on respect for their profession. Moloney (2010) states that preschool teachers do not receive the same respect as teachers working in the upper grades of the school, which jeopardizes the value of early childhood and is the main problem of those working with preschool children.

At this point, it is thought that adults' conceptions of childhood are also reflected on teachers who play an important role in children's lives. As a result of the research on adults' understanding of childhood, it was revealed that they have an innocent child image that defines children as innocent, needy and undeveloped (Balasar, 2019). A society that has these thoughts about children may also be reflected in the understanding of preschool teachers, who are the teachers of the youngest age group, towards their profession.

Preschool teachers' profession requires constant attention and care, they have difficulties in communicating with children, they need to be energetic and healthy at all times, and overcrowded classrooms are among the issues that the participants have difficulty with. Current research on this topic also reveals that preschool teachers experience difficulties in similar areas. For example, a study conducted by Başturan and Görgü (2020) shows that preschool teachers have difficulties with “the high number of students and difficulties based on physical facilities”. In another study conducted by Yalçın, F. A., & Yalçın, M. (2018), it was stated that they had difficulties in dealing with children and communication, especially because the classroom conditions were not suitable for the number of students.

Responsibilities towards Children

The theme of responsibilities towards children was analyzed in three categories: legal responsibilities as a teacher, special responsibilities as a teacher, and responsibilities as an adult/citizen. Preschool teachers have some legal responsibilities towards the department and ministry they are affiliated with. These obligations are clearly set out in the legislation and regulations of the MoNE (2021) on preschool education institutions. When the research findings are analyzed, it is seen that most of the legal responsibilities stated by the participants in the child-related, developmental, professional and educational dimensions reflect the obligations determined by these laws and regulations. However, the most frequently mentioned legal responsibility related to children is that it is important to raise children as good individuals. This view is not only among the legal but also among the universal responsibilities of preschool teachers, and the MoNE (2013) Preschool Program philosophically supports this view. In addition, preschool teachers stated that developing prosocial behaviors such as sharing and cooperation, setting a good example for the children they spend important hours of the day with, and making children love school so that they can come to school happily should be seen as a legal responsibility. Teachers' views in this direction were found to be in line with the principle of “Developmentally Appropriate Practices”, which is an effective philosophy in early childhood education around the world (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2021).

The participants' views on supporting children's development, ensuring children's safety by protecting them from possible dangers, doing the necessary work to ensure that children who will start primary school after preschool are as ready as possible for the new period they will enter, and providing good education to children cover their professional responsibilities as stated in the regulations. According to NAEYC's (2019) standard on the professionalism of early childhood educators, early childhood educators should be informed advocates for young children and their families and for their profession. It also emphasizes the importance of knowing and practicing their professional responsibilities specified in the regulations (NAEYC, 2019). In the Australian education standards (New South Wales [NSW] Education Standards, 2021), educators are expected to define children and know how they learn, master content and how to teach it, plan and implement effective teaching and learning, create supportive and safe learning environments, provide feedback to children, engage in learning, and interact with colleagues, families, and the community. Communication and collaboration, which were not mentioned by the teachers in this study but are also included in NAEYC Standard 6 and emphasized in 21st century skills, are thought to be valuable for everyone working with young children.

In their opinions about their special responsibilities as teachers, the participants stated that they could not work with children without feeling special responsibilities in addition to legal responsibilities, that they thought they had a conscientious responsibility towards children, that they protected children from dangers and that they saw them as their own children when necessary. The most critical and valuable years of life coincide with the preschool education period (Dalbudak, 2006). For this reason, it is thought that not only preschool teachers but also all personnel working with preschool children should work by considering human values in addition to their legal responsibilities. Morrison (2003) stated that the competence that preschool teachers should have has four dimensions: social, personal, educational and professional experience; the personal dimension consists of four elements: character, emotional qualities, physical and mental health. It is possible to associate both the legal and private professional responsibilities that preschool teachers feel

towards children with the competencies they possess. Morrison (2003) considered these competencies of teachers within the scope of emotional qualities within the personal dimension together with characteristics such as loving and respecting children, acting compassionately, understandingly and reassuringly towards them. In addition to all these, caring is stated as the most important emotional quality and it is stated that the point where qualified educators differ from others is the value they give to children.

In the other findings of the study, teachers' responsibilities as adults, a significant number of the participants stated that as adults, they have many responsibilities towards children in society, that they are especially sensitive to children who work on the streets or who are in difficult situations in their environment, and that they should set a good example not only for the children in their classrooms but for all children. They also stated that they want to ensure that all children receive education under equal conditions, use natural resources (such as water) carefully for future generations, leave a livable World without wars for children, and pass on traditions and customs to children. Considering the NAEYC (2019) standards, it should not be forgotten that these ideas are not only a conscientious responsibility, but should also be ensured and secured by communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to raise the understanding of teachers whose view of childhood is described as “innocent” to the understanding of “participatory child”, it should be added to the course content in undergraduate programs. However, as a learning approach, attitude-changing approaches and active learning methods should be put into practice to develop perspectives and understandings in the direction of the participatory child. More importantly, teacher training programs can be updated to reflect the participatory child as a philosophy. In-service programs for teacher-child collaboration and the reflection of the participatory child understanding in classrooms can be expanded. Preschool classrooms should be organized in a way that every child can receive education in line with universal design principles. Teachers' knowledge and skills about family involvement activities can be increased, based on the fact that the most important problem they experience is their relations with families and that this situation may negatively affect their views on children. Measures can be taken to increase the quality of family involvement in schools. Children's views (citizen children) should be taken into account in all activities to be carried out in all areas related to children in society, and children should be provided with adequate support and conditions to express their views.

In general, the opinions of preschool teachers in all subheadings of the study can be associated with an overprotective approach towards children, but it would be more accurate to reveal this relationship with other studies. According to the results of this study, it is our greatest hope that the views of teachers, who are thought to have an “innocent child” understanding, will evolve towards a “participatory child” understanding of childhood.

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