

Art-Based Kindergarten Practices and Their Coherence with Art Curriculum Objectives

Rasim Basak¹ & Cagla Erdem¹

¹Department of Art Education, School of Education, Uludag University, Bursa, Turkey

Correspondence: Rasim Basak, Department of Art Education, School of Education, Uludag University, Bursa, Turkey.

Received: July 20, 2022

Accepted: September 29, 2022

Online Published: October 17, 2022

doi:10.5539/jel.v11n6p119

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v11n6p119>

Abstract

Kindergarten teachers use art-based activities and practices because they are useful and functional in learning processes and they help learning in other subject areas. While teachers allocate great deal of classroom time for art practices, an art curriculum is not required or enforced at kindergarten level. The objective of this study was to examine kindergarten curriculum, and to clarify at what extent curriculum objectives and learning outcomes met art education learning outcomes specified for elementary level art education state standards. Document content analysis and descriptive survey questionnaire were used to collect information. Content analysis method was also employed to examine classroom applications and practices. Kindergarten curriculum and visual arts curriculum were also compared and analyzed in relation to teacher responses. The study clarified a need for an art integrated approach to kindergarten. Kindergarten activities majorly consist of art-based practices, therefore kindergarten curricula should be designed based on an art-based comprehensive understanding of educational interventions.

Keywords: visual arts, art education, early childhood, curriculum, arts integration

1. Introduction

In our evolutionary lineage, survival was the fundamental objective at the beginning, over time we have structured complex educational systems and processes so much that 'survival' has long been forgotten. Today, educational systems, paradigms and objectives focused on skills and expectations shaped mostly by the modern times. Nevertheless, education has always had great significance in human life to procreate new generations. Therefore, objectives, outcomes and contents of curriculum and the courses has been largely debated. In the recent years, we have observed great technological advances, consequently curriculum contents and courses are being debated again. Recent educational shifts are fundamentally structured around the technological developments and the STEM fields gained more popularity, in this respect whether we still need art courses in the curriculum has been another question. While technological advances require universal approaches and strategies in part; cultural differences, regional and national needs will also require individualized methods and means.

Technological and scientific advances made educational processes more complicated and societal structures have become so complex that early childhood education goes beyond traditional education in family (Güleş & Erişen, 2013). These changes have increased responsibilities of early childhood educational institutions and kindergartens. As a result, service, curriculum content and quality of these institutions need to be inspected and evaluated. Early childhood educational institutions provide programs for children's multi-dimensional developmental needs by means of qualified teachers within healthy and safe educational environments (Aral, Kandir, & Can Yaşar, 2003; Oktay, 2010). According to Albrecht and Miller (2004), educational programs for this age group have great importance to provide educational and developmental needs of children. Likewise, their program objectives concentrated on children's needs of healthy development and teaching of skills necessary for their future (Hirsh, 2004, p. 5).

Educational philosophies and systems are structured based on predetermined aims, objectives and targets. Curriculum, course contents and other elements of instruction are positioned in the later steps of the hierarchy and they all need to be in alignment (Gökaydın, 2002, p. 4). Humankind showed a tendency to create art as we see as early as cave paintings and sculptures. This interest and impulse is also instinctive and part of evolutionary human nature. Therefore, art education has become a part of educational systems over thousands of years.

Kindergarten is an intervention system to prepare children to elementary education in terms of their cognitive, social, physical, emotional and language developmental needs (Bekman & Gürlelel, 2005). Kindergarten education is a system in alignment with universal values as to provide necessary educational environment for environmentally disadvantaged children, and helping them with their developmental needs including their creative developments (Merdol, 1999; Meydan, 1984; Turan, 2004).

Educational policies and interventions about early childhood is not very old. Children start learning from birth, and early childhood education started to be seen as a necessity ever since women started their professional careers (Dirim, 2004, p. 7; Erden, 2010, p. 12). Early childhood education considers children's cognitive, emotional, language, motor, self-care and other developmental needs within a rapid developmental stage (Oktay, 2007, p. 11); their individualized differences and needs are also considered in this process. Designing a curriculum supporting their learning and developmental needs of these rapid developmental stage has crucial importance (Albrecht & Miller, 2004, pp. 27–30). Accordingly, kindergarten curriculum should aim children to go through a healthy developmental process, and to acquire skills needed for their future lives (Hirsh, 2004, p. 5).

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the United States, specified necessary qualifications needed for a well-established kindergarten program (Catron & Allen, 2003, pp. 158–159), these are:

- The programs should consider children's developmental needs.
- The programs should build learning on their lives and what they already know.
- The programs should allow children to experience, assert and communicate their cultures.
- Program objectives should be structured based on children's developmental needs, skills and abilities and should be observable.
- Technology and instructional strategies should be integrated into program and curriculum contents.

Kindergarten curriculum activities include; language, art, drama, music, physical exercises, game, science, math, preparation to reading and writing, and field trips. Classroom activities are designed individually but various activities could be integrated and combined as well (MEB, 2013). In addition, these activities are organized as for individual students, for small groups and larger groups depending on their instructional objectives. Individual activities comprise of a child's whole learning environment and aim for child to learn by doing and through direct experience. Small group activities are the tasks they complete as small groups, in those activities they arrange into small groups based on task requirements, while larger group activities still do not consist of whole class members but of comparably larger groups (MEB, 2013). Howard Gardner (2004, p. 86), described early childhood years as "a time each child shines through art". Bowker and Sawyers (1988), claimed that children's artistic survival skills were taken lightly. In addition, it was claimed that being exposed to art at early years is critical and if not nurtured, recovery may be difficult (Eisner, 1988).

There have been views about how art should be taught at kindergarten classrooms, what practices it should include, and what the best methods and strategies to teach art are. The place, role and position of art in life, society and school have been largely debated. Starting by 1980s, definition of art education went beyond child's free expression and headed towards social, aesthetical, and cognitive inquiry directions. In this endeavor, many early childhood education and art education researchers adopted social interaction approaches (Kindler, 1996a; Kindler, 1996b; Kolbe, 1991; Matthews, 1999; Wright, 1991). Smith (1982 & 1983) signified art teacher's role and involvement in kindergarten classrooms and suggested that art teachers have essential role in meaningful art making processes, in identification of artistically talented children and nurturing their artistic skills. Most countries today, concentrated on creativity and problem-solving skills in their educational systems (Eckersley, 1992). Children's inquiry and exploration skills are associated with games; "children learn through games" have been a commonly accepted dictum in the early childhood literature (Berk, 1997; Katz, 1996; Perry & Irwin, 2000).

The recent views, regard children as individuals with free will based on democratic tenets. Some of contemporary early childhood educators contend that art can be taught as a language of multitude of media offered to children without interference to their freedom. Such a disposition is believed to support children's appreciation of learning process (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1994; Malaguzzi, 1993). A balanced and stabilized curriculum is essential to support children's needs in various areas of development. *Turkish National kindergarten education curriculum* (MEB, 2013), specified expected educational outcomes as listed below:

- Supporting children's physical, cognitive, emotional developmental needs and acquisition of good habits.
- Preparing children for elementary education.
- Providing equal opportunities and supportive educational environment for environmentally disadvantaged children and for children of disadvantaged families.
- Serving and supporting children's developmental needs of correct use of language.

Art education is currently not specified in the kindergarten curriculum, but it could be traced in the "emotional development" section. Visual Arts Education curriculum is designed for 1st through 8th grade levels. It was stressed in the program that art education is necessary for all age groups because it meets outcomes such as individual self-expression, aesthetical sensitivity and consciousness, and provides various social advantages (MEB, 2018a). Elementary level educational outcomes include art-based content and applications, while middle school level outcomes are built on preexisting knowledge and skills of students such as analysis, interpretation, evaluation and creating original artworks.

When we review the main objectives in the program content, kindergarten curriculum includes a statement that "Creative development is primary concentration" (MEB, 2013). This objective in particular and other objectives show that the term 'art' is essential and mentioned repeatedly throughout the curriculum. Conclusively, we could remark that outcomes and objectives of kindergarten curriculum are not aligned with Visual Arts Education curriculum although art is used extensively in the kindergarten classroom.

2. Statement of the Problem and Study Objective

A centralized national curriculum is endorsed in Turkish educational system, for each course and for every grade level throughout K-12 that includes kindergarten. Ministry of National Education (MEB) is the central government authority which determines and enforces all educational policies, curricula and requirements for all K-12 schools, daycares and educational services including private schools. However, art education curriculum is not designed for different grade levels of elementary school, instead there is only one art education curriculum, standardized and enforced throughout elementary education. For example, math classes have outcomes for elementary, middle school and kindergarten grade levels correspondingly. On the other hand, there is no art education curriculum designed specifically for kindergarten level, although classroom applications and practices are mostly based on art. Art teachers are currently responsible to teach visual arts courses throughout 4-12; therefore, teacher training institutions of higher education do not support program contents to train art teachers for kindergarten, yet. Therefore, kindergarten teachers are responsible for the kindergarten curriculum and teach all content, activities and practices by themselves. On the other hand, kindergarten education is becoming increasingly more widespread and recently mandated throughout the country. Accordingly, objective of this study is to clarify, at what extend kindergarten curriculum content, outcomes and practices are consistent with art education elementary level curriculum content and outcomes. Consequently, research question was structured as "Do art-based kindergarten activities and practices correspond to general elementary level art education curriculum outcomes and objectives?"

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study is structured as a case study and supported with descriptive survey. In the study, as a qualitative approach, set of multiple cases examined within their environmental variables. This multiple-case study model allowed each and individual cases to be focused and compared within their environmental independent variables. The research design was useful to compare and contrast whether applications and practices in individual kindergarten programs met art education curriculum outcomes and objectives.

3.2 Sampling and Participants

This study aimed to compare kindergarten classroom applications and practices with art education program objectives and outcomes. Therefore, the study's universe consisted of all kindergarten institutions and kindergarten teachers in Turkey. The study was conducted in Bilecik which is located in the North Western part of Turkey in the Marmara region. As a comparably medium sized town, Bilecik has a population of approximately 78500. Representative convenience sampling method was used based on location and data collection opportunities, and Bilecik was appropriately and conveniently chosen as the research location.

Number of participants were expanded to reduce and minimize sampling error. In addition, number of sample institutions and teachers were increased to diversify participants which serves to increase reliability and validity

of collected information. The participant teachers worked at different schools, and they had different experiences, their responses to the survey may have differed and they may have used various instructional documents and materials. Consequently, purposive maximal sampling method (Creswell, 2012; as cited in Creswell, 2018, p. 292) was considered and all kindergarten teachers were included in the study to incorporate different views and to see the larger frame of information. The study is bounded within 3–6 age group of children who attend to kindergarten. Therefore, educational institutions teaching children within this age range and the teachers who teaches at these schools were selected as participants in the study. These schools included private kindergartens, kindergartens which are parts of larger public elementary schools and independent kindergartens.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Content analysis and survey were used to collect and analyze information. Data were collected from a variety of resources including instructional materials and documents used by teachers, art education curriculum, kindergarten curriculum and classroom activity contents, textbooks for children provided by the ministry of education, teacher-endorsed and recommended supporting instructional materials, resources and student portfolios. School meeting reports and transcripts were also collected and used specifically to compare and illustrate information collected through surveys based on the research question.

The survey questionnaire was designed based on outcomes specified in the art education curriculum. Outcomes based on art objectives were specifically integrated into the survey items to inform and match which outcomes were considered when teachers planned their classroom activities. The questionnaire items were designed to correspond with the research question and to determine what outcomes and objectives teachers considered while planning activities. Accordingly, the survey questionnaire included 22 items with five-level Likert scale questions for teacher respondents.

3.4 Data Collection Process

The survey questionnaire was administered to the participant kindergarten teachers as the first phase of data collection process. The names and contact information of schools were obtained from *Bilecik National Department of Education*. Participant information details (i.e., type of institution, number of teachers, address) were accessed and collected through schools' web sites. Each school was visited, and all teachers were informed about the study. Their voluntary participation was requested while they were informed about official Ethics committee permission and given study consent forms. The survey questionnaires were administered directly during visits. A total of 142 kindergarten teachers in Bilecik filled out the survey questionnaire and participated in the study.

During data collection process following the interviews, the resources used in the classrooms were examined, photographs of these resources were taken, and some resources were borrowed from the teachers to be returned after being analyzed during extended parts of the study. The study was designed based on various research questions and the data collected was processed and analyzed according to the research questions correspondingly. In addition, various documents such as teachers' instructional notes, records and materials, student files, meeting reports etc. were obtained from teachers to be analyzed.

3.5 Analysis

Content analysis method was employed to resolve and interpret qualitative information collected through survey and documents, and compared results were reported. Each questionnaire item was evaluated separately, teacher responses and corresponding documents were compared respectively (Table 1). Content analysis is defined as detailed analysis and interpretation of materials based on certain criteria (Neuendorf, 2002 as cited in Berg & Lune, 2015, p. 381). Although content analysis method is usually used for written documents, it is also used to analyze and decipher other forms of qualitative information (Patton, 2018, p. 453).

Survey questionnaire was responded by 142 teachers, which number included all kindergarten teachers teaching in the town of Bilecik. However, it was seen that 22 respondents answered only a few education related questions but left out the art education related questions. In this case, it was impractical to process and decipher exact meanings therefore, those 22 responses were omitted during analysis and evaluation. A total of 126 participant responses were included and evaluated in the study. Responses to the survey questionnaire and information collected through documents went through content analysis and they were also constantly compared. Each questionnaire item was evaluated respectively in itself, teacher responses and the associated documents were examined and analyzed together correspondingly (Table 1).

Table 1. Constant comparison of data within content analysis

Questionnaire item	Corresponding item of kindergarten curriculum	Inference
Item 8: I stipulate my students to learn, value and conserve their own and others' cultural heritages.	Outcome 9: Students are able to explain values of different cultures. (Evidences: they can tell values of their own culture, they can relate and distinguish similarities and differences of their culture and other cultures, they discern that countries have unique cultures and values).	Items are consistent with each other.

4. Findings and Interpretation

Comparison and evaluation of curriculum content and outcomes were needed to decide compatibility of outcomes and objectives. A statement in the general objectives section of art education curriculum explained the fundamental philosophy of art education as followed:

Art education is not only for artists or for artistically talented individuals. Art education supports self-expression, develops aesthetical consciousness and sensitivity. Those outcomes contribute to society and provide advantages for both individual and the society. Therefore, art education is a necessity for individuals of all ages (MEB, 2018a, p. 8).

Art teachers are expected to know and consider curriculum general objectives. Therefore, in what extent teachers consider and follow curriculum outcomes has great importance. Kindergarten teachers were asked 22-item questionnaire to find out how and at what extent their choices met Visual Arts education general objectives when planning classroom activities and practices. When the survey was being designed each program outcome of the Visual Arts curriculum was used to structure an item in the questionnaire. Participant responses were shown as frequencies on Table 2. These responses were also explained and interpreted based on Art Education curriculum objectives.

Table 2. How art education curriculum outcomes were addressed within visual arts-based activities and practices implemented by kindergarten teachers according to their lesson plans

Visual Arts based classroom activities and practices	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. I assure my students to gain skills outlined in Turkish National Educational philosophy frame and fundamental objectives.	79	46		1	
2. I support and contribute my students to develop visual literacy consciousness, visual perceptive and aesthetical consciousness.	72	53	1		
3. I assure that my students learn about visual arts related basic concepts, practices and skills.	67	52	7		
4. I support my students to participate and evaluate visual arts related discussions actively and provide necessary environment.	27	47	40	9	3
5. I encourage my students to explore and question origins, nature and value of visual arts.	20	45	41	14	6
6. I encourage and support my students to follow and explore current cultural dynamics, current art and design trends.	24	58	32	11	1
7. I create and support my students' awareness of visual culture and sustainability concepts (i.e., economics, environmental), encourage them to study these concepts, participate in and organize related activities.	25	47	31	18	5
8. I stipulate my students to learn, value and conserve their own and others' cultural heritages.	59	50	11	6	
9. I encourage my students to communicate their ideas, learn methods, materials, and strategies; and use technology in art making processes effectively and safely.	58	58	9		1
10. I acknowledge my students to see and make connections between art and other disciplines.	33	57	28	5	3
11. I encourage my students to learn and convey ethical behaviors in art.	69	51	5		1
12. I encourage my students to learn about art related professions and careers.	70	47	9		
13. I encourage my students to explore environment, get inspiration from, and to pass it on to the new generations.	52	57	14	3	
14. I encourage my students to think critically and to develop ethics of criticism.	45	67	11	3	
15. I allow them to express courage and entrepreneurship through visual arts education processes.	53	59	9	4	1
16. I encourage my students to understand importance of art in economic development, cultural development and sustainability.	27	56	34	7	2

17. I encourage my students to use knowledge and skills acquired through art education in their daily life experiences.	56	59	7	4	
18. I assure my students consider that individuals have various skills and abilities.	97	29			
19. I encourage my students to learn group working habits and collective working habits through art education.	82	38	6		
20. I encourage my students to use correct and articulate language while talking about artworks they experienced.	85	33	5	2	1
21. I assure that my students preserve moral, humanitarian, social and national values	75	46	3	2	
22. I inspire my students to learn and experience artworks and art making.	76	49	1		

Note. n = 126.

The first item of the questionnaire was: “I assure my students to gain skills outlined in Turkish National Educational philosophy frame and fundamental objectives.” 79 participants out of 126 responded as “always”, 46 responded as “usually”, 1 responded as “rarely”. None of the participants responded as “sometimes” or “never”. We know that the teachers working in Turkish schools are enforced to follow rules, regulations and curriculum set forth by the National Ministry of Education (MEB) as the central governmental authority. Therefore, the item responses were not surprising. Nevertheless, notably, 47 teachers responded as “usually” and “rarely”. Although, this first item is deemed to be fundamental and basic national principle of the curriculum, teachers might have experienced a confusion regarding the meaning and content of “educational philosophy and skills”.

The second item of the questionnaire was: “I support and contribute my students to develop visual literacy consciousness, visual perceptive and aesthetical consciousness”. 72 participants out of 126 responded as “always”, 53 responded as “usually”, 1 responded as “sometimes”. None of the participants responded as “rarely” or “never”. Visuals have become the primary stimuli in modern life; consequently a new concept “visual literacy” was born. John Debes (1968, p. 961) described visual perception as “a group of visual abilities which could be improved as combining with other perceptive skills”, Debes mentioned only about perceptive dimension of visual reading. When we look at the concept of “visual literacy”, the term literacy included both reading and writing. However, only “reading” aspect was stressed at the beginning as we understand from Debes’ definition. The emphasis on visual reading ability has escalated to visual communication and there have been a consensus over time that visual literacy is an independent perceptive ability which depends solely on visual senses (Tüzel, 2010).

Language development section of the kindergarten curriculum has a corresponding outcome (#8), “Children communicate what they listen and observe in various ways”. According to Chen et al. (2015) even though it is an abstract concept, aesthetical skill is associated with the nurture of soul and fundamentals of national competition potential. In addition, kindergarten curriculum (Outcome #13: protects aesthetical values) also reminds us that the concept of aesthetics was indeed considered in the curriculum. Responses to the item were clustered around “always” and “usually”, this shows that related art education curriculum objective and kindergarten curriculum objective correspond to each other and teachers consider this outcome accordingly.

The third item of the questionnaire was: “I assure that my students learn about visual arts related basic concepts, practices and skills”. 67 participants out of 126 responded as “always”, 52 responded as “usually”, 7 responded as “sometimes”. None of the participants responded as “rarely” or “never”. When we review the kindergarten curriculum, we do not see an outcome directly associated to the item #3. Nevertheless, when we examine the content of the classroom practices we could speculate that teachers have related skills and competency and include visual arts related concepts, practices and skills in their lesson plans. In addition, 7 teachers responded as “sometimes”, we could say that teachers do not consider only visual arts objectives but they think versatile and rather integrate other disciplines with art.

The fourth item of the questionnaire was: “I support my students to participate and evaluate visual arts related discussions actively and provide necessary environment”. 27 participants out of 126 responded as “always”, 47 responded as “usually”, 40 responded as “sometimes”, 9 responded as “rarely” and 3 responded as “never”. None of the participants responded as “rarely” or “never”. We could say that a scattered distribution of the responses may be because of misinterpretation of the related outcome. In this regard, they may have discerned the statement “active participation and evaluation” as students to show their artworks, listen to classmates’ reactions and evaluations. They might also have associated this outcome with other kindergarten curriculum objectives below:

Outcome 4 (Social and emotional development section): Students will be able to tell and explain others’ emotions related to an event or a situation. (Evidences: they can tell others’ emotions. They can tell the reasons of others’ emotions. They can tell the consequences of others’ emotions).

Outcome 5: Students will be able to express and communicate their feelings about an event or a situation

appropriately. (Evidences: they express or communicate their negative or positive feelings verbally. They express negative emotions through positive behavior).

The item #4 of the art education curriculum outcome requires critical thinking skills. However, we do not see an outcome in the kindergarten curriculum directly associated to critical thinking.

The fifth item of the questionnaire was: "I encourage my students to explore and question origins, nature and value of visual arts". 20 participants out of 126 responded as "always", 45 responded as "usually", 41 responded as "sometimes", 14 responded as "rarely" and 6 responded as "never". When we review the distribution of responses we see an increased number for the choice, "never"; and this might indicate a confusion. This item as an outcome is under the cultural inheritance section of the Visual Arts curriculum. We can confer that the participants who responded this item with "rarely" or "never" apprehended this outcome more properly. This outcome serves to explore, discuss and associate historical progress of visual arts, yet, it is not stated as an outcome in the kindergarten curriculum. However, we could argue that the respondents associated this item with the kindergarten curriculum outcome #14 (below) which is specified under social and emotional development section.

Outcome 14: Students realize the value of artworks. (Evidences: they tell what they see and hear in the artworks. They communicate their emotions about artworks clearly. They care about conservation of artworks).

The sixth item of the questionnaire was: "I encourage and support my students to follow and explore current cultural dynamics, current art and design trends". 24 participants out of 126 responded as "always", 58 responded as "usually", 32 responded as "sometimes", 11 responded as "rarely" and 1 responded as "never". This item of the questionnaire is an outcome listed under the section, "visual communication and formation" of the Visual Arts curriculum. Although the responses were scattered, positive responses were comparably greater. We do not see an outcome corresponding to this item in the kindergarten curriculum. Based on the communications with the teachers, it could be inferred that teachers consider this outcome in relation to museum trips and the artworks exhibited on the classroom walls.

The seventh item of the questionnaire was: "I create and support my students' awareness of visual culture and sustainability concepts (i.e., economics, environmental), encourage them to study these concepts, participate in and organize related activities". 25 participants out of 126 responded as "always", 47 responded as "usually", 31 responded as "sometimes", 18 responded as "rarely" and 5 responded as "never". Visual culture and sustainability is not included in the kindergarten curriculum. The reason may be because of sophisticated nature of these concepts for lower grade levels. It may not be developmentally appropriate and children of these age groups may not be able to study these concepts yet. The activity organization mentioned in this outcome is not simply organizing a game and inviting friends, it meant activities with solely artistic purposes, which is not appropriate for the age group yet. However, teachers still responded this item positively. It may be that they wanted to respond to each item anyway even though they did not quite apprehend the meaning.

The eighth item of the questionnaire was: "I stipulate my students to learn, value and conserve their own and others' cultural heritages". 59 participants out of 126 responded as "always", 50 responded as "usually", 11 responded as "sometimes", 6 responded as "rarely" and none of them responded as "never". Majority of responses clustered around "always" and "usually". We could assume that the teachers reacted to this outcome positively and accommodated this outcome in their classrooms. This item is listed under "cultural inheritance" section of the Visual Arts curriculum. It corresponds to Outcome 9 (below) of kindergarten curriculum, under the section "social and emotional development". Therefore, we could say that a Visual Arts Education outcome is also a part of kindergarten curriculum and teachers consider this outcome in their classroom activities and practices.

Outcome 9: Students are able to explain values of different cultures. (Evidences: they can tell values of their own culture, they can relate and distinguish similarities and differences of their culture and other cultures, and they discern that countries have unique cultures and values).

The ninth item of the questionnaire was: "I encourage my students to communicate their ideas, learn methods, materials, and strategies; and use technology in art making processes effectively and safely". 58 participants out of 126 responded as "always", 58 responded as "usually", 9 responded as "sometimes", and 1 responded as "never", none of them responded as "rarely". Participant responses to the survey questionnaire and their interview responses were consistent. The participants explained their classroom practices and concerns. For instance, they clarified how they use visuals as learning materials; how they use variety of techniques; how they find activities, lesson ideas and solutions in the social media; how they analyze student needs; how they encourage students to communicate their emotions; and to develop aesthetical consciousness. We could say that participant responses are consistent for this item. The following outcomes in the language development section of the kindergarten

curriculum are associated with the item ninth of the survey questionnaire:

Outcome 8: Children communicate what they listen and observe in various ways. (Evidences: they ask questions about what they listen and observe; they respond to questions about what they listen and observe; they can talk about what they listen and observe; they exhibit and express what they listen and observe through media such as painting, music, drama, poetry, and story-telling).

Outcome 10: Children read visual media. (Evidences: they analyze visual media; they explain visual media; they ask questions about visual media; they respond to questions about visual media; they create storyboards, stories, and tales through visual media).

Outcome 3: Children express themselves in creative ways. (Evidences: they communicate their ideas, emotions, and imaginations in unique ways; use objects and materials in exceptional ways; create products with unique characteristics).

The tenth item of the questionnaire was: “I acknowledge my students to see and make connections between art and other disciplines”. 33 participants out of 126 responded as “always”, 57 responded as “usually”, 28 responded as “sometimes”, 5 responded as “rarely” and 3 of them responded as “never”. The ‘Activities Handbook’ prepared by National Ministry of Education (MEB, 2018b) which contains 341 kindergarten activities was analyzed to see connections between art and other disciplines, and ‘disciplinary distribution of the activities’ tabulated on Table 3. The table shows 182 out of 341 visual arts integrated activities, versus 6 activities based solely on visual arts. This shows us that visual arts integration is already extensive in scale. Teacher responses and their affirmative behavior about visual arts also support that they comply with extensive integration and use of visual arts in their classroom activities. On the other hand, notably kindergarten education curriculum does not contain any outcomes supporting directly art education or art related objectives.

Table 3. Disciplinary distribution of the activities

Types of activities	Number of activities
Music-Art	5
Games-Art	15
Science-Art	20
Turkish language-Art	48
Drama-Art	7
Math-Art	10
Movement-Art	1
Field trips-Art	3
Reading-Art	4
Art	6
Art-integrated activities	69
Non-Art related activities	153
Total number of activities	341

The eleventh item of the questionnaire was: “I encourage my students to learn and convey ethical behaviors in art”. 69 participants out of 126 responded as “always”, 51 responded as “usually”, 5 responded as “sometimes”, and 1 of them responded as “never”, none of them responded as “rarely”. Early childhood is a very early stage of development to comprehend philosophy and ethics. Therefore, kindergarten curriculum does not have an outcome related to ethics. However, we could observe that teachers inculcate their students about good, bad, and ethics related values and concepts as part of ‘values education’.

The twelfth item of the questionnaire was: “I encourage my students to learn about art related professions and careers”. 70 participants out of 126 responded as “always”, 47 responded as “usually”, 9 responded as “sometimes”, and none of them responded as “rarely” or “never”. Although, career presentations are not part of kindergarten curriculum, the teachers may have considered the outcome 16 (below) and responded to this item positively.

Outcome 16 (Social and emotional development): Children are able to explain that individuals have different roles and responsibilities in social life. (Evidences: they can tell that there are individuals with different roles and responsibilities in the society; they can explain that the same individuals may have different roles and responsibilities in the society).

On the other hand, paradoxically National Early Childhood Counselling Curriculum (MEB, 2012) shows that

career counselling starts at Early Childhood stage (see below):

Professional Development Section: Professional development is an ongoing process and starts at the early childhood. We propose and aim children to develop positive conceptions about professions instead of stereotypes. The outcomes listed under the heading of ‘competencies’ aim for children to learn about professions, to develop positive attitudes toward professions, and to develop awareness of their importance and place in life.

Accordingly, we could conclude that the teachers’ responses about art-related professions and careers are acceptable and they comply with the curricula.

The thirteenth item of the questionnaire was: “I encourage my students to explore environment, get inspiration from, and to pass it on to the new generations”. 52 participants out of 126 responded as “always”, 57 responded as “usually”, 14 responded as “sometimes”, 3 responded as “rarely”, and none of them responded as “never”. We could conclude that teachers think and evaluate kindergarten curriculum outcome #5 and the item #13 of the questionnaire as serving to the same purposes. Therefore, their responses showed a compliance with kindergarten curriculum.

Outcome 5 (Cognitive development): Children are able to observe existence, beings and phenomena (Evidences: children can tell objects’ or beings’ names, colors, shapes, sizes, lengths, textures, sounds, smells, materials, tastes, amounts, functions and uses).

The fourteenth item of the questionnaire was: “I encourage my students to think critically and to develop ethics of criticism”. 45 participants out of 126 responded as “always”, 67 responded as “usually”, 11 responded as “sometimes”, 3 responded as “rarely”, and none of them responded as “never”. This questionnaire item in Art Education curriculum is listed under the heading: ‘Learning outcomes: art criticism and aesthetics’. However, it does not have a corresponding outcome in the kindergarten curriculum. A statement from the discipline-specific skills section in the Visual Arts curriculum is followed:

These collective outcomes consist of art-based theoretical knowledge and applications and they are defined comprehensively for Elementary level. Building upon their preexisting knowledge and skills, Middle School objectives prioritized students’ inclination to be able to analyze, interpret, evaluate, and finally create unique artworks (MEB, 2018a).

It could be speculated that specifying a critical thinking outcome for kindergarten may not be reasonable while such outcomes are not defined even for Elementary level first graders. Teacher responses showing their compliance to cover critical thinking skills in their classroom practices is not consistent with kindergarten curriculum.

The fifteenth item of the questionnaire was: “I allow them to express courage and **entrepreneurship through visual arts education processes**”. 53 participants out of 126 responded as “always”, 59 responded as “usually”, 9 responded as “sometimes”, 4 responded as “rarely”, and 1 of them responded as “never”. It could be speculated that the teachers might have related the following kindergarten curriculum outcomes about ‘confidence and entrepreneurship skills’.

Outcome 7 (Social and emotional development): Children motivate themselves to accomplish tasks and responsibilities. (Evidences: starts task without being directed by adults; shows effort to finish tasks on time).

Outcome 15 (Social and emotional development): Feels self-confidence. (Evidences: children tell what they like or dislike about themselves; express themselves in front of groups; tell their contrasting ideas when needed; take responsibility as leaders when needed).

The sixteenth item of the questionnaire was: “I encourage my students to understand importance of art in economic development, cultural development and sustainability”. 27 participants out of 126 responded as “always”, 56 responded as “usually”, 34 responded as “sometimes”, 7 responded as “rarely”, and 2 of them responded as “never”. kindergarten curriculum does not contain an outcome regarding economic development, cultural development and sustainability issues. However, outcome 9 (below) may be partially related to cultural development. Nonetheless, outcome 9 is not directly related to development but it rather supports cultural heritage, conservation of cultural values, and supports cultural diversity.

Outcome 9 (Social and emotional development): Children can explain diverse cultural characteristics. (Evidences: children can tell their countries’ cultural characteristics; can tell distinctive characteristics of their country and other countries; can tell other countries’ unique cultural characteristics).

On the other hand, teacher responses to the questionnaire item clustered around positive choices. Teachers either

may not have understood the item correctly or misinterpreted its meaning since they possibly do not implement economic development, cultural development and sustainability issues into their practices at this age level yet.

The seventeenth item of the questionnaire was: "I encourage my students to use knowledge and skills acquired through art education in their daily life experiences". 56 participants out of 126 responded as "always", 59 responded as "usually", 7 responded as "sometimes", 4 responded as "rarely", and none of them responded as "never". The outcome related to this item is pedagogically fundamental for all areas of education. Educational philosophies and objectives aim to use and apply learned material and knowledge in real life situations and experiences. Kindergarten curriculum practices and activities focus so much on art-based activities that teachers naturally expect classroom activities to reflect on children's daily lives. Therefore, as expecting classroom activities to manifest themselves in real life situations, teachers seem to value and appreciate art education objectives in their classrooms. On the other hand, the teachers who responded to this item as "sometimes" and "rarely" may have interpreted this item literally; therefore, they perhaps did not care much about these art-based outcomes.

The eighteenth item of the questionnaire was: "I assure my students consider that individuals have various skills and abilities". 97 participants out of 126 responded as "always", 29 responded as "usually", none of the participants responded as "sometimes", "rarely", or as "never". Understanding, respecting and showing tolerance for diversity is crucial to build a democratic society. It is possible that teachers may have thought about "individuals' various skills and abilities" as part of social and cultural differences. The kindergarten curriculum outcome #8 (below) may be associated with this Visual Arts curriculum outcome (item #18 on the questionnaire). In this respect, we could say that the related Visual Arts outcome corresponds with the kindergarten outcome. Consequently, teacher responses show consistency with the curriculum.

Outcome 8 (Social and emotional development): Children show respect for differences and diversity. (Evidences: children identify and tell their own differences; tell that people have differences; they participate and involve with children in activities inclusively).

The nineteenth item of the questionnaire was: "I encourage my students to learn group working habits and collective working habits through art education". 82 participants out of 126 responded as "always", 38 responded as "usually", 6 responded as "sometimes", none of them responded as "rarely", and as "never". Teachers showed a positive consensus on this social-behavioral outcome. Although, group and collective work habits are not stated in kindergarten curriculum outcomes, independent and collective behavioral objectives are mentioned repeatedly throughout the curriculum. In addition, participants reported that group work habits contribute and support children's personality developments.

The twentieth item of the questionnaire was: "I encourage my students to use correct and articulate language while talking about artworks they experienced". 85 participants out of 126 responded as "always", 33 responded as "usually", 5 responded as "sometimes", 2 responded as "rarely", and 1 of them responded as "never". The Language Development section of the kindergarten curriculum includes outcomes related to communication of ideas and emotions, including but not limited to talking about art and also other aspects of language and communication. Participant responses to this questionnaire item is generally positive, it may be because of the kindergarten curriculum objectives under the Language Development section. These outcomes are listed below:

Outcome 3 (Language development): children structure sentences based on syntax rules. (Evidences: children structure straight sentences, negative sentences, question sentences, and integrated sentences; they use components of sentences correctly).

Outcome 4 (Language development): children use grammatically correct structures of language while speaking. (Evidences: when structuring sentences, children use noun, verb, adjective, conjunction, plural expressions, adverb, pronoun, preposition, noun cases and negative structures).

Outcome 5 (Language development): children use language for communication purposes. (Evidences: children make eye contact while speaking; understand gestures and mimes; they use gestures and mimes while speaking; they start, maintain and end verbal communications; they talk politely; participate in conversations; listen respectfully; communicate their feelings, ideas and dreams; and explain the reasons of their emotions and ideas).

Outcome 6 (Language development): children build up their vocabularies. (Evidences: children notice new words and ask about their meanings while listening; remember the words and define their meanings; use the recently learned words correctly; use synonyms, antonyms, and homonyms).

The curriculum objectives of these outcomes are supporting children's language development and communication

of their emotions. Teachers who responded as “sometimes” and “rarely” may have considered item-specific and exact meaning of the outcome as “correct and articulate use of language while talking about artworks”.

The twenty-first item of the questionnaire was: “I assure that my students preserve moral, humanitarian, social and national values”. 75 participants out of 126 responded as “always”, 46 responded as “usually”, 3 responded as “sometimes”, 2 responded as “rarely”, and none of them responded as “never”. This outcome is also listed as one of the main objectives of Turkish Education system, reaching these expectations through art is also an objective of Visual Arts curriculum. As one of the findings it should be noted that teachers support their students to reach these values and expectations through art activities and practices.

The twenty-second and the last item of the questionnaire was: “I inspire my students to learn and experience artworks and art making”. 76 participants out of 126 responded as “always”, 49 responded as “usually”, 1 responded as “sometimes”, none of them responded as “rarely” and as “never”. Art centered educational interventions and practices aim to prepare students with artistic and aesthetic sensitivity. These practices also aim to inspire them for art making and also expect them to be informed art audience. Teachers’ constructive ideas about this questionnaire item reveal that teachers show effort to reach specified Visual Arts outcome.

The findings were analyzed and interpreted based on document content analysis to clarify as to what extent kindergarten curriculum, classroom practices and activities were consistent and corresponding with the Visual Arts outcomes specified in the curriculum. Document content analysis showed that various outcomes in the kindergarten curriculum and the Visual Arts curriculum were correspondingly related. *Activity Handbooks* were designed for the kindergarten teachers by the Ministry of Education and included 341 activities. However, when these 341 activities in the Handbook examined, it was seen that limited number of Visual Arts outcomes were included in the *Activity Handbook*. Analysis revealed that all the outcomes of 341 activities were paired with the kindergarten curriculum outcomes of various developmental areas correspondingly; unfortunately, art education outcomes were not considered although many of these activities clearly corresponded to art education curriculum outcomes. It may imply that art-based activities in the kindergarten classroom are seen as a vehicle to meet social, cognitive, emotional, language and sensory-motor developmental needs of children meaning that art is solely used as a functional tool and artistic developmental needs or art outcomes are not taken into consideration although kindergarten education is heavily relied on visual arts. It is also a common misunderstanding that arts integration means using art to support educational objectives of other classes but not art objectives. Table 4 showed the number of kindergarten classroom activities corresponding to art outcomes but formally classified under other developmental categories in the official activities handbook without addressing any art objectives.

Table 4. Art outcomes and number of activities in the handbook corresponding these outcomes

Developmental area heading:	Art-related outcomes: (not listed in the activities handbook)	Number of Activities:
Cognitive Development	13. Students recognize the symbols used in Daily life	1
	14. Students construct patterns with objects.	1
Language Development	8. Students express and communicate what they listen and observe in various ways.	14
	10. Students comprehend visual materials.	33
Social and emotional Development	3. Students express themselves in creative ways.	58
	13. Students conserve aesthetic values.	5
Sensory-Motor development	14. Students acknowledge values of artworks.	2
	4. Students do movements that require small muscle uses.	97
	Total number of activities corresponding to at least one art outcome and their proportion to total number of activities.	211/341 (62%)

Note. * Self-care skills and habits do not correspond to any outcomes therefore not listed on the table.

Table 4 showed that the highest number of activities (97) targeted small muscle uses and development (outcome #4); the second highest number of activities (58) targeted outcome of creative expressions (outcome #3) under Social and Emotional development. When classroom practices evaluated, no practices and activities corresponded with objectives to develop self-care skills and habits through Visual Arts. Number of activities on the table showed that most of the kindergarten classroom activities have corresponding hidden or direct art outcomes although the official handbook classified these activities under only social, cognitive, emotional, language and sensory-motor developmental needs category headings. Clearly, art objectives is a standpoint considered by neither the early childhood education professionals nor by the Ministry of National Education. Analysis showed that 211 kindergarten activities out of 341 (62%) corresponded to at least one art outcome and yet art objectives were never mentioned in the handbook.

5. Results

Findings of this study showed that kindergarten curriculum content and outcomes are consistent with Visual Arts Education curriculum when compared in terms of activities, applications and practices. However, kindergarten curriculum does not have corresponding outcomes for some Visual Arts curriculum outcomes.

When participant responses to the survey analyzed, the meanings and the outcomes were not clear and there were confusions about questionnaire items 4, 5, 6, 7 based on Visual Arts Education objectives. It was obvious that Visual Arts objectives needed substantial articulation. In most cases, the outcomes were not clear, they were controversial, and could be interpreted in various ways. In some cases, teachers were confused about the controversial meanings of the outcomes and they had difficulty understanding the outcomes described in the questionnaire. Controversial meanings and interpretations of some outcomes may also cause applicability issues, and yield to differing applications and practices, consequently they will be almost impossible to meet as objectives. Educational objectives and outcomes should be stated clearly and concisely, they should prevent any misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

Teachers reported conflicted statements showing that most teachers had difficulty understanding the outcomes, and they responded to the items based on their personal inferences. Although teachers reported that they use art effectively to develop self-care habits, kindergarten curriculum does not have such statements. When we compare both curricula correspondingly we see many outcomes in Visual Arts curriculum with potential to use in kindergarten curriculum. However, we see only a few outcomes in the kindergarten curriculum which corresponds to the Visual Arts curriculum. We could conclude that visual arts in the kindergarten activities and practices show a limited use isolated from their Visual Arts curriculum outcomes. We could also conclude that Visual Arts curriculum should be written in a clear, coherent, and concise language.

6. Conclusion

This study was not conceptually framed around an existing kindergarten art education curriculum. There is neither a kindergarten art curriculum nor there is one practically enforced. However, as explained in this study, kindergarten educational practices majorly consist of visual arts-based applications and practices. This fundamental fact requires us to reconsider kindergarten art education from scratch. Current kindergarten curriculum and National curriculum general art education objectives show some partial coherence nevertheless.

Kindergarten education has been made mandatory in Turkey recently and government policies put more effort since they realized its significance for it is the first step of a life-long educational process. However, art education is still not considered as part of these attempts. Art teacher training programs still do not include kindergarten level teacher training courses in their education programs, therefore current in-service art teachers are not prepared to teach at kindergarten level.

Another shortcoming as revealed in this study is that official art education objectives set by the Ministry of National Education central authority are not concise or clearly articulated. It is clear that kindergarten teachers currently are unable to benefit from a well-articulated and clearly defined art objectives designed specifically for kindergarten level. It seems more than necessary and therefore suggested that art teacher training programs should adapt and redesign their program contents and courses to address urgent needs of kindergarten education. Kindergarten education is more widespread and recently made mandatory in all parts of the country, therefore we soon expect new art requirements and sanctions taken by the ministry.

Based on the needs as explained in this study, the literature is very limited and there is need for research focusing on kindergarten art practices and art education in general. Kindergarten activities majorly consist of art-based practices, therefore kindergarten curricula should be designed based on an art-based comprehensive understanding of educational interventions. Art teachers currently are not appointed for kindergartens as educational mandate, hence kindergarten teachers may be provided with in service art teaching training by art education departments of universities.

References

- Albrecht, K., & Miller, L. G. (2004). *The comprehensive preschool curriculum*. Maryland.
- Aral, N., Kandır, A., & Can Yaşar, M. (2003). *Early childhood education*. İstanbul: Ya-Pa Publications.
- Bekman, S., & Gürlelel, C. (2005). *The correct beginning: early childhood education in Turkey*. TÜSİAD (Publication Number: TÜSİAD-T/2005-05/396.) Retrieved from <https://tusiad.org.tr/yayinlar/raporlar/item/333-dogru-baslangic-turkiyede-okul-oncesi-egitim>
- Berk, B. L., & Lune, H. (2015). *Qualitative research methods in social sciences* (Translated from 8th ed., H.

- Aydın Ed.). Konya: Eğitim Publications.
- Berk, L. (1997). *Child Development* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bowker, J. E., & Sawyers, J. K. (1988). Influence of exposure on preschoolers' art preferences. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 3, 107–115. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0885-2006\(88\)90032-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/0885-2006(88)90032-4)
- Catron, E. C., & Allen, J. (2003). *Early childhood curriculum, a creative play model*. New Jersey: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Chen, J. S., Kerr, D., Tsang, S. S., & Sung, Y. C. (2015). Co-production of service innovations through dynamic capability enhancement. *The Service Industries Journal*, 35(1–2), 96–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02642069.2014.979405>
- Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Qualitative research methods: qualitative research design based on the five approaches*. Ankara: Siyasal Publications.
- Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (1999). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Postmodern perspectives*. London: Falmer Press.
- Debes, J. (1968). Some foundations of visual literacy. *Audio Visual Instruction*, 13, 961–964.
- Dirim, A. (2004). *Early childhood education for Girls' Vocational Schools*. İstanbul: Esin Publishing.
- Eckersley, R. (1992). *Youth and the challenge to change: bringing youth, science and society together in the new millennium*. Carlton: Australia's Commission for the Future.
- Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. (1994). *The hundred languages of children*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Eisner, E. W. (1988a). *The role of discipline-based art education in America's schools*. Los Angeles: Getty Center for Education in the Art. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3193012>
- Erden, E. (2010). Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Middle East Technical University, Graduate School of Social Sciences, Ankara, Turkey.
- Gardner, H. (2004). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences* (20th anniversary ed.). New York: Basic Books.
- Gökaydın, N. (2002). *Art education fundamentals*. Ankara: MEB Publications.
- Güleş, F., & Erişen, Y. (2013). Setting environmental standards in Early Childhood Education: an analysis based on peer opinions. *The Journal of Institute of Social Sciences*, 30, 129–138.
- Hirsh, R. A. (2004). *Incorporating multiple intelligences, developmentally appropriate practice, and play*. Early childhood curriculum. Boston: Pearson.
- Katz, L. (1996). *Children as learners: a developmental approach*. Paper presented at the Weaving Webs: Collaborative Teaching and Learning in the Early Years Curriculum Conference, University of Melbourne.
- Kindler, A. (1996a). Myths, habits, research and policy: The four pillars of early childhood art education. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 97(4), 24–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632913.1996.9935068>
- Kindler, A. (1996b). Artistic learning in early childhood: A study of social interactions. *Canadian Review of Art Education*, 21(2), 91–106.
- Kolbe, U. (1991). Planning a visual arts program for children under five years. In S. Wright (Ed.), *The Arts in Early Childhood*. Sydney: Prentice Hall.
- Malaguzzi, L. (1993). History, ideas and basic philosophy. In C. Edwards, L. Gandini & G. Forman (Eds.), *The hundred language of children*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Matthews, J. (1999). *The art of childhood and adolescence: the construction of meaning*. London: Falmer Press.
- MEB. (2012). *National Early Childhood Counselling Curriculum*. Turkish National Ministry of Education. Ankara.
- MEB. (2013). *Early Childhood Curriculum*. Turkish National Ministry of Education. Ankara.
- MEB. (2018a). *Visual Arts Education Curriculum*. Turkish National Ministry of Education. Ankara.
- MEB. (2018b). *Activity Handbook for Teachers: Early Childhood Education*. Turkish National Ministry of Education. İzmir: Çağlayan Publishing.
- Merdol, K. T. (1999). *Nutrition education guide for Early Childhood Education teachers and institutions*.

İstanbul: Özgün publishing.

- Meydan, S. (1984). *A glance at Early Childhood Education in Turkey*. Ya-Pa Early Childhood Education Seminary. İstanbul: Ya-Pa Publishing.
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2002). *The content analysis guidebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Oktay, A. (2007). Importance and dissemination of Early Childhood Education. In A. Oktay & Ö. Polat-Unutkan (Eds.), *Current issues in Early Childhood Education* (pp. 11–24). İstanbul: Morpa Kültür Publishing.
- Oktay, A. (2010). Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education; their importance and place in child's life. In A. Oktay (Ed.), *Preparation to Elementary Education and Elementary Education curricula* (pp. 2–6). Ankara: Pegem Publishing.
- Patton, Q. P. (2018). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (Trans. M. Bütün & S. B. Demir). Ankara: Pegem.
- Perry, R., & Irwin, L. (2000). *Playing with curriculum*. Brisbane: QUT.
- Smith, N. (1992). The visual arts in early childhood education: development and the creation of meaning. In B. Spodek (Ed.), *Handbook for Research in Early Childhood Education*. New York: Free Press.
- Smith, N. (1993). *Experience and art: teaching children to paint*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Turan, F. (2004). Evaluation of Early Childhood Education institutions regulation and curriculum. *Milli Eğitim Dergisi*, 162. Retrieved from https://dhgm.meb.gov.tr/yayimlar/dergiler/Milli_Egitim_Dergisi/162/turan.htm
- Tüzel, A. (2010). Visual literacy. *Türklük Bilimi Araştırmaları*, 27, 691–705. Retrieved from <http://dergipark.org.tr/tubar/issue/16968/177255>
- Wright, S. (1991). Beyond a developmental approach to the arts. In S. Wright (Ed.), *The arts in early childhood*. Sydney: Prentice Hall.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author, with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).