

Early childhood preservice teachers' perceptions about art activities: A cross-cultural study*

Lütfiye Coşkun¹

Abstract

This study aims at identifying American and Turkish early childhood preservice teachers' perceptions of the purpose of art activities in early childhood education and the relationships between rankings of the participants made through a self-reported importance order survey. A total of 270 preservice teachers studying at the University of North Texas and Kilis 7 Aralık University participated in the study. "Art activities evaluation sheet" was used to collect data. The data were analyzed using median values, Man Whitney U Test, and Kruskal-Wallis H test. The obtained results showed that there are both some similarities and differences in the American and Turkish preservice teachers' perceptions of the purpose of art activities. Both American and Turkish early childhood preservice teachers gave the highest priority to the same item "Art activities improve creativity". However, some items were valued differently by American and Turkish preservice teachers. No gender-related differences were observed in the rank orders of both American and Turkish preservice teachers.

Keywords:

Early childhood preservice teachers, art activities, early childhood education

Cite: Coşkun, L. (2022). Early childhood preservice teachers' perceptions about art activities: A cross-cultural study. *Journal of Innovative Research in Teacher Education*, 3(2), 128-143. <https://doi.org/10.29329/jirte.2022.464.5>

* The approval of the ethics committee regarding the compliance of the research with the ethical rules was obtained from the Kilis 7 Aralık University Ethics Committee with the decision dated 13/03/2020 and numbered 02.

¹ Corresponding author, Kilis 7 Aralık University, Kilisli Muallim Rifat Faculty of Education, Elementary Education, Turkey, lutfiyeseven@hotmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Art activities are an integral part of early childhood programs and enable children to develop physically, cognitively, linguistically, socially, and emotionally (McFadyen Christensen & Kirkland 2009; Miller, 1996). Art activities provide children to interact with environments familiar to them and express their feelings without using verbs. Furthermore, such activities can help them feel secure and stimulate their imagination, thus promoting children's emotional and cognitive development through activating their problem-solving skills (Epstein, 2001; Thobaben, 2013). Also, according to Bautista et al. (2018), some specific art types are central to the development of children's national and cultural identity. These activities provide important benefits in terms of both revealing their emotions and discovering artistic concepts and are activities that children enjoy participating in (Henniger, 2005). Art in preschool education is not only an entertainment time for children but also a daily activity in which they receive a rich education (Kim, Park, & Lee, 2001).

An examination of Turkey's 2002, 2006, and 2013 preschool education curricula showed that art is included in all curricula as an important activity and accordingly, there should be an art-related learning center in all classrooms. Also, in these curricula, art activities are defined as activities that help the child solve problems by using their creativity and imagination allow the child to think critically and solution-oriented, help them develop their communication skills by expressing themselves and allow children to better understand themselves, their culture and other cultures, helping them to respect differences.

Turkish 2006 Preschool Education Curriculum particularly highlights that art activities can be implemented both alone and as complementary activities. Previous studies showed that integrating art activities into education practices has a great influence on children's academic success (Lee, Patall, Cawthon, & Steingut, 2015; Nutov, 2021). Moreover, many scholars emphasized that art activities contribute to the social, emotional, motor, and cognitive development of children. For example, in a study conducted by Ismail, Abdul, and Mohamad (2019), it was found that visual art provided to preschool students and teaching art in the preschool period promotes children's learning and development of social skills. Consistent with these findings, Savas, Yalcin, and Satan (2020) determined that the development of social skills in preschoolers' improved through activity-based visual arts education. Yazıcı (2017) examined the impact of art education programs on the social skills of preschoolers aged 61-72 months. Results of that study showed that the "Art Education Program" significantly promotes social skills in all fields.

Teachers should provide an environment that supports children's artistic production and perspective (Boyd & Cutcher, 2015). Because with art activities students' perspectives on art develop and their sensitivity toward art increases (Dawn, 2013). It was stated that teachers can promote creative art activities in early childhood classes in many ways (Henniger, 2005; Miller, 1996). The most important arrangement that teachers should make while planning art activities is to create environments that allow children to explore freely and to make activities suitable for children's development (Miller, 1996; Schirmacher, 2006; Shulsky & Kirkwood, 2015). Furthermore, teachers' emotional support and motivation that children need during such activities will positively contribute to children's emotional development (Schirmacher, 2006). In a study by Bae (2004) examining teachers' behaviors during art activities, the author found that guided behaviors of teachers were effective on children, and accordingly, it was emphasized that it is important for teachers to state their opinions about the works of children and to sit with children to maintain their interest in art activities. Similarly, Epstein (2001) pointed out the importance of participating in art activities with children by saying "Teachers can make art activities more meaningful by talking to children about topics such as what they do and how they feel while doing these works." Furthermore, well-planned art activities provide children with a meaningful learning experience, and their sense of achievement and self-confidence increases accordingly (Kim et al., 2001).

Thus, the teachers' guidance for children during art activities is very important. For example, presentations and discussions held together by teachers before art activities affect children's perception of art. Moreover, children could learn to use different artistic techniques and gain aesthetic appreciation through art practices carried out under the guidance of a mentor teacher (Epstein, 2001). Teachers should support children's cognitive development by giving open verbal cues during art activities and supporting child-centered open-ended activities, breaking down activities into smaller steps, gradually increasing activity difficulties, and encouraging children to talk about the art activities (Schirmacher, 2006).

Previous studies emphasized that teachers should be aware of their reactions to children's artistic works (Twigg & Garvis, 2010). Eckhoff (2013) found that encouraging particular practices such as sharing ideas and expertise, supporting students' interests, working side by side, providing persuasive and physical support, listening and speaking, in-group interaction, individualized attention, and open-ended conversations on the art table help children gain quality and meaningful experiences. In the studies conducted by Öztürk-Yılmaztekin and Tantekin Erden (2017), art was used as an evaluation tool during course activities since the authors believed that children's understanding can be measured using their artwork.

Simply, teachers should be aware of the influence of arts activities on children's academic success and learning (Eliason & Jenkin, 2003). Artistic development in children highly relies on teachers' expertise since in-class art activities are carried out by teachers (Brittain, 1979). However, many studies on classroom activities in the preschool period revealed that preschool teachers lack knowledge and self-confidence in arts education (Thompson & Bales, 1991). To provide children with effective education, undergraduate-level education should provide preschool teacher candidates with a sense of trust, sufficient knowledge, and skills (Bae, 2004; McArdle, 2012). Therefore, teachers need to have adequate training so that they can create a process that supports children's artistic development. Thus, relevant teacher roles and justifications for these roles should be given to teachers during the undergraduate education period (Douglas & Schwartz, 1967).

Preschool teachers experience a constant change in personality and understanding as they progress from students, trainee teachers, and finally, to professional teachers (Graue, 2005). During this transition period, teachers' beliefs take shape and change depending on their past experiences and abilities (Graue, 2005; Trent, 2013). For example, in a study by Garvis (2012), it was found that in-class art practices were associated with the amount of art education that teachers received during their undergraduate education, and therefore, it was stated that a majority of the teachers did not receive sufficient art-related training during their undergraduate education. A similar result was obtained by Özkan and Girgin (2014). They examined the visual art activities carried out by preschool teachers and found that the art training that teachers received during their undergraduate education was insufficient.

Teachers' beliefs about art activities arise from their personal and professional experiences gained during their education life (Garvis & Lemon, 2013). According to Garvis and Pendergast (2010), a teacher who believes that art activities are important for education provides children with more opportunities to experience art activities. Thus, it is important to determine prospective teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of art activities (Garvis & Lemon, 2013). Previous studies revealed that teachers' beliefs could be shaped more easily before starting their profession, that is, during their undergraduate education (Decker & Rimm Kaufman, 2008; So & Watkins, 2005). To determine the needs of teachers to become effective supporters of the arts, their beliefs about art activities should be identified (Orek, 2006). Teachers' views on arts are very important for the successful implementation of arts education (Hui, He, & Sam Ye, 2014).

Many previous studies examined teachers' opinions and beliefs about art (Aydoğdu & Ayanoğlu, 2020; Bilir Seyhan & Ocak Karabay, 2018; Bullock & Galbraith, 1992; Garvis & Pendergast, 2011; Lee & Cawthon,

2015; Rihter & Potočnik, 2020). However, only a few cross-cultural studies have compared teachers' views toward art. Among these studies, Gatt and Karppinen (2014) investigated the feelings and attitudes of teacher candidates from two different countries Malta and Finland about arts and crafts. Accordingly, only a few countries were compared in previous studies and to the best of our knowledge, no study has yet presented a comparison of teacher candidates from the U.S. and Turkey. Therefore, the current study is believed to make a valuable contribution to the literature.

Our study was conducted based on the idea that teachers' perceptions and beliefs may have an impact on the activities they will plan and carry out in the future. Because the benefit that children will obtain from art activities depends on the practices provided by teachers and naturally, these practices are influenced by the past experiences of teachers related to art activities. It is thought that determining preservice teachers' perceptions about the purposes and potential benefits of art activities can reveal their lacking points. By making arrangements to fix the identified lacking areas, teachers are expected to carry out divergent practices for different purposes of art activities. Finally, due to the above-mentioned factors, the author believes that determining the perceptions of future teachers regarding art practices will make a significant contribution to the literature in terms of applying a correct educational approach to the implementation of art activities. Accordingly, art activities-related importance rankings of teacher candidates who were enrolled in the early childhood teacher education program of the universities in the United States and Turkey were determined. Based on the findings of the present study, teachers' attitudes towards the arts activities, as well as the similarities and differences between the perceptions of preservice teachers in the U.S. and Turkey are determined.

This study aims at determining the perceptions of American and Turkish preservice teachers toward art activities. Accordingly, this study sought to answer the following questions;

1. What are the American and Turkish preservice teachers' importance rankings of purposes of art activities?
2. Are there any significant relationships between American and Turkish preservice teachers' importance rankings of purposes of art activities?
3. Do preservice teachers' perceptions about the purposes of art activities differ according to nationality?
4. Do Turkish and American preservice teachers' importance rankings of purposes of art activities differ according to their gender?

METHOD

Research Design

The relational model was used in this study. The relationships between American and Turkish early childhood preservice teachers' perceptions of the purposes of art activities in early childhood education were examined using the descriptive analysis method.

Data Collection and Sample

The "Art activities evaluation sheet" developed by the author was used as the measurement tool in the current study. The sheet was prepared based on the theoretical studies on art activities to measure participants' perceptions of the purposes of art activities (Bullock & Galbraith, 1992; Henniger, 2005; Schirmacher, 2006). To examine whether the developed items measure the targeted characteristics, expert opinions were obtained from 5 field experts who were faculty members in the early childhood college of the University of North Texas and Kilis 7 Aralık University. The draft sheet was reviewed and finalized according to expert opinions. Using this sheet, the participants were asked to rank 10 different purposes of art by scoring them using the numbers from 1 to 10 (1: the most important 10: less important) once each and only once. For example, an item that is ranked first by a participant receives a score of 1; an item that is ranked last by a participant receives a score of 10. Before applying the surveys, ethical permissions were obtained from the institution. In order to determine the reliability of the sheet,

the sheet was applied to a group of 20 students twice with an interval of 15 days. The rank order coefficients of correlation for test-retest ranking scores of the items varied between .42 (creativity) and .72 (small muscle development). The mean correlation coefficient was calculated as .52. The rank order coefficients of correlation were found to be significant for all items ($p < .05$). The final version of the items is shown in Table 1. A total of 270 preservice teachers studying at early childhood education programs of the University of North Texas and Kilis 7 Aralık University participated in the study.

Data Analysis

Previous studies examined rankings with median values and analysed differences in the importance ranking of perceptions using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (Özdemir & Sezgin, 2011; Sağnak, 2005). Accordingly, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (Spearman's rho) was used in the current study to determine the difference between preservice teachers' importance rankings. Since the participants ranked the items using ranking numbers, the median values were used instead of arithmetic mean (Özdemir & Sezgin, 2011). Nonparametric tests, Mann-Whitney U test, and Kruskal-Wallis H test were used to compare groups.

Research Ethics

The approval of the ethics committee regarding the compliance of the research with the ethical rules was obtained from the Kilis 7 Aralık University Ethics Committee with the decision dated 13/03/2020 and numbered 02.

FINDINGS

The calculated median values for the American and Turkish preservice teachers' rank order and the results of the Mann-Whitney U test and the Kruskal-Wallis H test were discussed below.

Since the sample size is larger than 50, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted to determine whether the data is normally distributed. The obtained results are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Scale Items and Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality tests

No	Items "Art Activities..."	Statistic	df	P
1	Support small muscle skill development	0.133	270	0.000
2	Promote hand-eye coordination	0.144	270	0.000
3	Improve concentration skills	0.104	270	0.000
4	Improve creativity	0.246	270	0.000
5	Support the ability to use art materials and tools	0.228	270	0.000
6	Increase design skills by teaching various art techniques	0.201	270	0.000
7	Provide prosocial behaviors such as sharing, cooperation, and helping	0.169	270	0.000
8	Support the expression of feelings, thoughts, and ideas	0.177	270	0.000
9	Support communication skills	0.158	270	0.000
10	Support paying attention to the protection of works of art	0.270	270	0.000

The results of the normality test showed that items were not normally distributed ($p > 0.05$). Accordingly, nonparametric tests were used in the analysis of the data.

Preservice teachers' importance rankings of purposes of art activities

To find the answer to the first research question, "What are the American and Turkish preservice teachers' importance rankings of purposes of art activities?" importance rankings regarding the purposes of art activities of the participant preschool teacher candidates were examined and the results obtained are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Importance Rankings of The Items According to The Nationality of The Preservice Teachers (Median values)

Item no	American preservice teachers (n=128)	Turkish preservice teachers (n=142)
1	5	3
2	6	4
3	5	5
4	3	1
5	8	8
6	9	8
7	3	6
8	2	5
9	4	6
10	8	10

As seen in Table 2, American preservice teachers ranked items 8, 7, and 4 as the top-three important items. Furthermore, they ranked items 5, 6, and 10 in the last three. On the other hand, Turkish preservice teachers ranked items 4, 1, and 2 as the top-three items and items 5, 6, and 10 in the last three. These findings indicate that both American and Turkish preservice teachers had similar perceptions regarding the purpose of art activities since they placed item 4 in the top three and items 5, 6, and 10 in the last three places.

As mentioned above, both American and Turkish preservice teachers give high priority to item 4, "Art activities improve creativity in children". Similar results were obtained in previous studies conducted by Gökdemir (2019) and Özkan and Girgin (2014). In these studies that examined early childhood teachers' views of the benefits of arts and crafts activities, teachers displayed a common view that art activities promote children's creativity and help improve small muscle skills. Aydoğdu and Ayanoglu (2020) based on the preservice teachers' comments determined that art activities support the multi-directional development of young individuals since these activities require using fine motor skills.

The results obtained also indicated that both American and Turkish preservice teachers had similar perceptions regarding items 5 and 6, "Art activities support the ability to use art materials and tools" and "Art activities increase design skills by teaching various art techniques" as they put these items at the bottom of the list. On the other hand, McClure, Tarr, Thompson, and Eckhoff (2017) identified 8 rules for effective art education; some of these rules emphasized the importance of the use of materials in art activities. Regarding both items, it is stated that the use of art-based techniques enables children to define their views, their environment, and the world (Eliason & Jenkin, 2003), and offering art materials to children enriches their life experiences (Henniger, 2005). Accordingly, it is considered important to provide different materials and techniques to the children by teachers. However, preservice teachers gave these two items low priority. It is thought that the preservice teachers who participated in our study did not have information about the importance of using different art techniques and materials and therefore did not give priority to these items. Consistent with our findings, a study conducted by Temiz (2017) showed that teachers always prefer similar techniques for art activities and do not tend to use different techniques.

Furthermore, the reason for participants having a similar perception of some items (4, 5, 6, and 10) might be due to the similar contents of the art courses they received during their undergraduate education. Despite some minor differences, the University of North Texas and the Kilis 7 Aralık University have similar arts and crafts courses as compulsory within the undergraduate degree for early childhood teacher education. These courses aim to prepare students to teach arts and crafts with some basic understanding, skills, and confidence.

Relationships between American and Turkish preservice teachers' perceptions

To address the second research question, "Are there any significant relationships between American and Turkish preservice teachers' importance rankings of purposes of art activities?", correlations between the items of the art activities evaluation sheet were analyzed and the results obtained are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlations Between the Items

Item no	American-Turkish	
	r	p
1	-0.059	0.510
2	-0.048	0.591
3	0.094	0.294
4	-0.126	0.156
5	-0.046	0.609
6	0.121	0.174
7	-0.099	0.267
8	-0.184	0.037*
9	-0.019	0.828
10	0.312	0.000**

*p<0.05 **p<0.01

According to the correlations between the items on the importance of art activities given in Table 3, the highest correlation between American and Turkish preservice teachers' perceptions was found for item 10 ($r=0.312$) and the lowest correlation was for item 8 ($r= -0.184$).

Considering these findings, it can be argued that both American and Turkish preservice teachers gave low priority to item 10. However, this item, "Art activities support paying attention to the protection of works of art", is highly related to one of the aims of arts education set out by the Consortium of National Arts Education Association (CNAEA) (1994). According to CNAEA (1994), one of the aims of arts education is to ensure that children pay attention to their own and others' work (Eliaison & Jenskin, 2003).

Accordingly, it was believed that preservice teachers both from Turkey and U.S. gave less priority to ensuring that children show pay attention to their work. In this regard, it may be beneficial for teachers to act as role models by giving importance to children's artworks. Similarly, Henniger (2005) stated that it is effective for the development of self-esteem in children and appreciation of art that educators give importance and value to the works produced by children.

Preservice teachers' perceptions about the purposes of art activities according to nationality

To find the answer to the third research question, "Do preservice teachers' perceptions about the purposes of art activities differ according to nationality?", the importance rankings of the participants were examined according to their nation. The results are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of Mann-Whitney U Test for Correlation Between the Nation of The Preservice Teachers

Item no	American (n=128)	Turkish (n=142)	U	p
---------	---------------------	--------------------	---	---

	Rank order				
1	150.59	121.89	7156.00	0.002*	
2	146.69	125.42	7656.00	0.024*	
3	138.37	132.91	8720.00	0.562	
4	144.61	127.29	7922.00	0.055	
5	143.91	127.92	8011.00	0.087	
6	159.87	113.53	5968.50	0.000*	
7	113.90	154.97	6323.00	0.000*	
8	108.40	159.93	5619.00	0.000*	
9	119.46	149.96	7035.00	0.001*	
10	119.51	149.91	7041.50	0.001*	

* $p < 0.05$

As shown in Table 4, significant differences were obtained between preservice teachers' importance rankings for item 1 ($U=7156.00$, $p < .05$), item 2 ($U=7656.00$, $p < .05$), item 6 ($U=5968.50$, $p < .05$), item 7 ($6323.00U$, $p < .05$), item 8 ($U=5619.00$, $p < .05$), item 9 ($U=7035.00$, $p < .05$), and finally, for item 10 ($U=7041.00$, $p < .05$). These results point out that while Turkish preservice teachers gave higher priority to items 1, 2, and 6 than American teachers, American preservice teachers gave higher priority to items 7, 8, 9, and 10 compared to Turkish preservice teachers.

Items 7, 8, 9, and 10 included statements such as "Art activities provide prosocial behaviors such as sharing, cooperation, and helping", "Art activities support the expression of feelings, thoughts, and ideas", "Art activities support communication skills", and "Art activities support paying attention to the protection of works of art". The contents of these items are related to social-emotional development. Therefore, it can be argued that American preservice teachers' perceptions of the purposes of art activities are more focused on supporting the social-emotional development of children compared to Turkish preservice teachers.

Unlike American preservice teachers, we found that the Turkish preservice teachers gave higher priority to the items, "Art activities support small muscle skill development", "Art activities promote hand-eye coordination", and "Art activities increase design skills by teaching various art techniques" than the American preservice teachers. These items are associated with motor development. Therefore, these findings revealed that Turkish preservice teachers' perceptions regarding the purposes of art activities were focused on supporting motor development in children. It is thought that the preservice teachers give higher priority to these items believing that different art activities such as cutting, tearing, and gluing paper and kneading improve the muscular skills of children. Similar to our findings, Schwarz and Luckenbill (2012) found that art activities promote and strengthen the small muscle skills of children.

It was considered that the differences in American and Turkish preservice teachers' perceptions regarding the purposes of art activities were caused by the number, duration, and content of art-related courses in their colleges' curriculums. Consistent with our findings, Aykut (2006) pointed out that the duration of Visual Arts Education (Painting-Work) courses in the American education system are three times that of Turkey, and the physical conditions of the school environment in the U.S. and therefore, American teacher competencies are better than Turkey. Moreover, the reason for the variation between the two groups could be related to cultural differences. According to Walsh (1993) and Richards (2007), arts are influenced by actions and experiences within cultures.

Similarly, previous studies highlighted that art activities depend on teachers' interests, in-class art practices depend on teachers' philosophies of arts education, and the amount of arts education they receive in the teacher education process (Eckhoff, 2011; Garvis, 2012). In a study conducted by Bilir Seyhan and Ocak Karabay (2018), the authors stated that the levels of awareness and knowledge of the students who take elective courses about art and aesthetics were higher than those who did not take

these courses. Furthermore, Karppinen, Kallunki, and Komulainen (2019) found that crafts courses affect teachers' pedagogic thinking and learning outcomes.

Preservice teachers' importance rankings of purposes of art activities according to gender

To address the fourth research question, "Do Turkish and American preservice teachers' importance rankings of purposes of art activities differ according to their gender?", correlations between the preservice teachers' importance rankings according to gender were analyzed and the results obtained are listed in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5. Results of Mann-Whitney U Tests for Turkish Preservice Teachers' Importance Rankings According to Gender

Item no	Female (n=130)	Male (n=12)	U	p
	Rank order			
1	72.19	69.75	1970.00	0.748
2	72.61	68.66	1926.50	0.604
3	69.13	77.55	1798.00	0.266
4	72.58	68.75	1930.00	0.591
5	73.00	67.68	1887.00	0.482
6	72.08	70.03	1981.00	0.786
7	69.10	77.61	1795.50	0.263
8	73.54	66.29	1831.50	0.340
9	68.02	80.38	1685.00	0.105
10	70.57	73.88	1945.00	0.628

Table 6. Results of Mann-Whitney U Tests for American Preservice Teachers' Importance Rankings According to Gender

Item no	Female (n=111)	Male (n= 17)	U	p
	Rank order			
1	66.36	61.94	1860.00	0.501
2	63.56	65.79	1928.50	0.734
3	62.72	66.94	1866.50	0.522
4	68.66	58.80	1690.00	0.123
5	64.03	65.15	1963.00	0.862
6	66.14	62.26	1877.00	0.550
7	62.59	67.12	1856.00	0.487
8	61.89	68.08	1804.50	0.334
9	60.68	69.74	1715.00	0.167
10	65.80	62.72	1902.00	0.630

As displayed in Tables 5 and 6, there were no significant gender-related differences in both American and Turkish preservice teachers' perceptions of the importance of art activities ($p > .05$). These results were similar for both American and Turkish preservice teachers. Consistent with our findings, Dilmaç, Koçyiğit, Tuğluk and Kaya (2008) reported that female and male students had similar opinions regarding the art teaching course in preschool. However, more studies are needed to gain more insight into the impact of gender on preservice teachers' perceptions of arts activities.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current study presents an examination of American and Turkish early childhood preservice teachers' perceptions of the purpose of art activities in early childhood education. Perhaps, one of the most valuable findings of this paper is both groups (American and Turkish) attach similar importance to most of the items. The findings indicated that there was not much variation in the perceptions of the participants from different nations. Both American and Turkish preservice teachers ranked item 4 "Art activities improve creativity" in the top three. Plus, both groups ranked item 5 "Art activities support the ability to use art materials and tools", item 6 "Art activities increase design skills by teaching various art techniques", and item 10 "Art activities provide prosocial behaviors such as sharing, cooperation and helping" on the last three places. In this regard, item 4 was the most valued, whereas items 5, 6, and 10 were the least valued by both groups.

The reason for giving the same priorities to the same items by the participants can be explained by the art practices that teacher candidates observed and were involved in early childhood classes. Similarly, a study by Garvis (2012b) showed that teacher candidates' artistic experiences affected their beliefs about arts education in early childhood education. However, some variation was also obtained between American and Turkish preservice teachers' importance ratings regarding the purpose of art activities. For example, items 1, 2, and 6 were perceived as more important by Turkish preservice teachers than by American preservice teachers. On the other hand, American preservice teachers gave high priority to items 7, 8, 9, and 10 than Turkish preservice teachers. An analysis of these items highlighted that while the American preservice teachers gave more priority to the social-emotional aspect of art activities, the Turkish preservice teachers valued the motor development dimension of art activities. These differences in the perceptions might be associated with the differences in the perspective of these two cultures on arts. Moreover, preservice teachers' self-efficacies may have had an impact on their perceptions. Similarly, Oreck (2006) emphasized that self-efficacy is the strongest determinant for the use of in-class art activities. On the other hand, Garvis and Pendergast (2011) indicate that teachers with strong self-efficacy in arts education are more likely to implement art in the classroom education program. Morris, Lummis, McKinnon, and Heyworth (2017) also pointed out the importance of self-efficacy in arts experiences offered by teachers to their students.

Ranking findings for Turkish students indicate that Turkish preschool teacher candidates had a perspective and beliefs that complies with both the Turkish Council of Higher Education's curriculum and The Ministry of National Education (MONE) 2013 Preschool Education Program. Art-related course contents of the Council of Higher Education's preschool teaching undergraduate program include concepts such as the definition and function of art; the history of arts education; the place and importance of art education in contemporary education; to be able to recognize and evaluate a work of art; definition and importance of creativity and art education in early childhood; child picture and characteristics according to developmental stages; pre-school art education methods and techniques, materials used; art education in the museum; theories and practices related to creativity and art education in early childhood; preparation and implementation of programs that support children's creative expression skills and aesthetic awareness. 2013 Preschool Education Program, on the other hand, includes activities that allow the child to solve problems and think critically, and be solution-oriented using their creativity and imagination.

UNT's Core Curriculum requirements offer a 3-hour Creative Arts course which includes Developing Critical Thinking, Communication Skills, Teamwork, and Social Responsibility. Also, Art Appreciation (Art elements and principles applied to forms of visual expression for art majors) and Art Appreciation for Non-Art Majors (Introduction to basic concepts and vocabularies of the visual arts worldwide, designed to expand aesthetic growth and involvement with the visual world) courses are offered to undergraduate students in UNT.

Ranking results of American students indicated that they attach more importance to the social and emotional aspects of arts activities rather than commonly reported aspects of motor development. Consistent with these findings, the courses offered at UNT include the social aspect of arts, and particularly focus on non-art majors to create art awareness among all teacher education students.

The findings of the current study pointed out that both American and Turkish preservice teachers' importance ratings regarding the purpose of art activities did not vary significantly with gender. In other words, both female and male preservice teachers had similar perceptions of the importance of art activities. Although we report no significant gender differences, further studies may provide in-depth insights into the effect of gender on preservice teachers' perceptions of art education.

Novaković (2015) conducted a study examining the visual arts knowledge of preschool teachers, their role in art activities, and the frequency of applying art activities. She found that all teachers were aware of the importance of art education and teachers should show continuous training and development to increase their professionalism. Also, Davies (2010) determined that training programs about arts offer preservice teachers useful experiences and promote their self-images.

Considering the positive impact of art activities on various aspects of children's development, it should be ensured that teachers implement art practices covering all skills of children. While doing this, teachers may use integrated activities. For example, arts can be integrated into different activities such as math. Many previous studies highlighted a similar fact. Integrated art activities support children in both academic and artistic development (Dawn, 2013; LaJevic, 2013). Many researchers emphasized that preschool teachers should provide integrated art education to children in the early years as a part of the program (Garvis & Pendergast, 2011; Hardy, 2011).

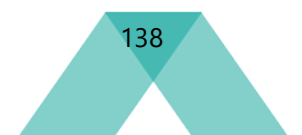
Furthermore, it was determined that American and Turkish preservice teachers, in general, gave higher priority to a wide variety of items instead of focusing on similar ones. It can be argued that the participants had general knowledge regarding the importance of in-class art activities.

The obtained results reveal that many factors such as past beliefs, self-efficacy, attitudes, past practices, and received education are effective on preservice teachers' perceptions of the importance of art activities. Bresler (1993) argued that teachers had three different views toward arts and each view is responsible for different teacher roles. Bae (2004) found that teachers' beliefs about visual arts affect their roles in art activities. On the other hand, Orek (2006) investigated teachers' characteristics and factors that limit/support the use of art in teaching practices and determined that students' learning styles and needs are the strongest source of motivation for teachers to implement art in classrooms.

Similarly, Garvis and Lemon (2013) claim that teachers' beliefs about art were affected by their past experiences in art. On the other hand, Orek showed that even teachers, who had strong beliefs about arts education are inadequate in terms of practice. According to Bullock and Galbraith (1992), it is very important to identify the link between thoughts and actions. Based on these reports, it is obvious that more studies are needed to determine teachers' practices and behaviors during art activities.

Although the current indicated that preservice teachers had similar perceptions regarding the purpose of art activities, it should be taken into account that their actual in-class practices may be different. As teachers' actual practices are determined and compared with their perceptions, in-depth insights into teachers' perceptions of art activities could be obtained. The following recommendations were proposed based on the findings of this paper:

To help teachers to provide rich arts education environments for children, they should be given a wide variety of experiences with art activities during their undergraduate education and internship practices.



Because the knowledge and experiences of teacher candidates during their undergraduate education will have an important impact on the in-class art activities they will implement for children, the teacher candidates should be given more compulsory and elective courses related to arts throughout their undergraduate education.

It should be ensured that teachers create rich learning environments for all purposes of art activities and thus the different development areas of children should be supported.

Further studies can be conducted to determine and support preservice teachers' awareness, knowledge, perceptions, beliefs, competencies, experiences, and practices about arts.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, this study is limited to 128 American and 142 Turkish preservice teachers. Similar studies can be conducted with a larger sample and the inclusion of different nations. The preservice teachers' perceptions of art activities were limited by the "Art activities evaluation sheet". More studies can be conducted using different measurement tools. Since no gender-related differences were found in rank orders, further studies may focus on other variables that could affect preservice teachers' perceptions of art activities.

Statement of Researcher

Researchers' contribution rate statement: The first author's contribution rate is 100%.

Conflict statement: The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

Support and thanks: I would like to thank Professor George S. Morrison (University of North Texas, Early Childhood Education) for his great contribution to the finalization of the scale items.

REFERENCES

- Aydođdu, F., & Aynođlu, M. (2020). Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının sanat etkinlikleri konusundaki görüşlerinin öğretmenlik uygulaması kapsamında incelenmesi [A review of the views of teacher candidates about art activities within the scope of teaching practice]. *Gazi University Journal of Gazi Educational Faculty*, 40(2), 699-726. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/947497> Access Date: 03/02/2021
- Aykut, A. (2006). Günümüzde görsel sanatlar eğitiminde kullanılan yöntemler [The methods, use of the visual art education in today]. *Erciyes University Journal of Social Sciences Institute*, 21(2), 33-42. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/erusosbilder/issue/23754/253102> Access Date: 03/01/2021
- Bae, J. H. (2004). Learning to teach visual arts in an early childhood classroom: The teacher's role as a guide. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 31(4), 247-254. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:ECEJ.0000024116.74292.56>
- Bautista, A., Moreno-Núñez, A., Bull, R., Amsah, F., & Koh, S. F. (2018). Arts-related pedagogies in preschool education: An Asian perspective. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 45, 277-288. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2017.12.005>
- Bilir Seyhan, G., & Ocak Karabay, S. (2018). Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının gözünden görsel sanat eğitimi ve estetik [Early childhood preservice teachers' views about visual arts education and aesthetics]. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 73, 131-148. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/ejer/issue/42503/512045> Access Date: 03/01/2021

- Boyd, W., & Cutcher, L. (2015). Learning from early childhood philosophy, theory and pedagogy: Inspiring effective art education. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 40(1), 91-98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/183693911504000112>
- Bresler, L. (1993). Three orientations to arts in primary grades: Implications for curriculum reform. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 94(6), 29-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632913.1993.9936939>
- Brittain, L. W. (1979). *Creativity, art, and the young child*. New York: Macmillan.
- Bullock, A. L., & Galbraith, L. (1992). Images of art teaching: Comparing the beliefs and practices of two secondary art teachers. *Studies in Art Education*, 33(2), 86-97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.1992.11651863>
- Dawn, B. (2013). Art integration and cognitive development. *Journal for Learning Through the Arts*, 9(1), 1-15. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1018320.pdf> Access Date: 08/07/2021
- Decker, L., & Rimm Kaufman, S. E. (2008). Personality characteristics and teacher beliefs among preservice teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(2), 45-64. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/23479223#metadata_info_tab_contents Access Date: 08/07/2021
- Davies, D. (2010). Enhancing the role of the arts in primary preservice teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26, 630-638. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.09.011>
- Dilmaç, O., Koçyiğit, S., Tuğluk, M. N., & Kaya, H. İ. (2008). Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının resim öğretimi dersine ilişkin algılarının incelenmesi (Erzurum ili örneği) [Investigation of the drawing lesson teaching perceptions of the prospective preschool teachers (Erzurum Case)]. *Atatürk University Journal of Kazım Karabekir Education Faculty*, 17, 94-107. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/ataunikkefd/issue/2770/37021> Access Date: 20/01/2022
- Douglas, N. J., & Schwartz, J. B. (1967). Increasing awareness of art ideas of young children through guided experiences with ceramics. *Studies in Art Education*, 8(2), 2-9. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1320032>
- Eckhoff, A. (2013). Conversational pedagogy: Exploring interactions between a teaching artist and young learners during visual arts experiences. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 41(5), 365-372. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-012-0567-0>
- Eckhoff, A. (2011). Art experiments: Introducing an artist-in-residence programme in early childhood education. *Early Child Development and Care*, 181(3), 371-385. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430903388089>
- Eliason, C., & Jenkins, L. (2003). *A practical guide to early childhood curriculum*. (7th Edt.). USA: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Epstein, A. S. (2001). Thinking about art: Encouraging art appreciation in early childhood settings. *Young Children*, 56(3), 38-43. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ej635770> Access Date: 06/02/2022
- Garvis, S., & Lemon, N. (2013). Are the arts important in schooling? Clear messages from the voices of preservice generalist teachers in Australia. *Australian Journal of Music Education*, 2, 98-104. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1061813.pdf> Access Date: 03/02/2022
- Garvis, S., & Pendergast, D. (2010). Supporting novice teachers of the arts. *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, 11(8),1-22. Retrieved from <http://www.ijea.org/v11n8/v11n8.pdf> Access Date: 03/02/2022
- Garvis, S., & Pendergast, D. (2011). An investigation of early childhood teacher self-efficacy beliefs in the teaching of arts education. *International Journal of Education & The Arts*, 12(9),1-16. Retrieved from <http://www.ijea.org/v12n9/v12n9.pdf> Access Date: 03/02/2022

- Garvis, S. (2012). Exploring current arts practice in kindergartens and preparatory classrooms. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 37(4), 86-93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/183693911203700412>
- Garvis, S. (2012b). These children aren't creative: Insights from beginning teachers on early childhood arts educations. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 37(1), 161-165. <https://doi.org/10.1177/183693911203700119>
- Gatt, I., & Karppinen, S. (2014). An enquiry into primary student teachers' confidence, feelings and attitudes towards teaching arts and crafts in Finland and Malta during initial teacher training. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 33(1), 75-87. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1476-8070.2014.12002.x>
- Graue, E. (2005). Theorizing and describing preservice teachers' images of families and schooling. *Teachers College Record*, 107(1), 157-185. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9620.2005.00461.x>
- Gökdemir, M. A. (2019). Okul öncesi eğitim öğretmenlerinin sanat etkinliklerinde karşılaştıkları sorunlar ve çözüm önerileri (Mardin Örneği) [Problems encountered by preschool education teachers in art activities and solution offers (Mardin Sample)]. *SDU International Journal of Educational Studies*, 6(2), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.33710/sduijes.566885>
- Hardy, W. L. (2011). Arts in early childhood education and the enhancement of learning (Unpublished doctoral thesis). Walden University. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/docview/903748015?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true>
Access Date: 30/01/2022
- Henniger, M. L. (2005). *Teaching young children* (and introduction). Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Hickman, R. (2008). Raising pupils' self-esteem through leadership activities in art. *Journal Compilation*, 25(3), 329-340. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1476-8070.2006.00499.x>
- Hui, A. N., He, M. W. J., & Sam Ye, S. (2014). Arts education and creativity enhancement in young children in Hong Kong. *Educational Psychology*, 35(3), 315-327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2013.875518>
- Ismail, H., Abdul, M. A., & Mohamad, I. (2019). The effect of Islamic visual art education on social development of preschool children. *Jurnal Pendidikan Awal Kanak-kanak Kebangsaan*, 8, 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.37134/jpak.vol8.1.2019>
- Karppinen, S., Kallunki V., & Komulainen, K. (2019). Interdisciplinary craft designing and invention pedagogy in teacher education: Student teachers creating smart textiles. *International Journal of Technology and Design Education*, 29, 57-74. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10798-017-9436-x>
- Kim, H., Park, E., & Lee, J. (2001). "All done! Take it home". Then into a trashcan? Displaying and using children's art projects. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 29(1), 41-50. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1023/A:1011308906808.pdf> Access Date: 27/02/2022
- Lajevic, L. (2013). Arts integration: What is really happening in the elementary classroom? *Journal for Learning Through the Arts*, 9(1), 1-28. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1018332.pdf> Access Date: 15/02/2022
- Lee, B., & Cawthon, S. (2015). What predicts preservice teacher use of arts-based pedagogies in the classroom? An analysis of the beliefs, values, and attitudes of preservice teachers. *Journal for Learning through the Arts*, 11(1), 1-15. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1086994.pdf> Access Date: 03/02/2022
- Lee, B. K., Patall, E. A., Cawthon, S. W., & Steingut, R. R. (2015). The effect of drama-based pedagogy on PREK-16 outcomes: A meta-analysis of research from 1985 to 2012. *Review of Educational Research*, 85(1), 3-4. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543314540477>

- McArdle F. (2012). New maps of learning for quality art education: What preservice teachers should learn and be able to do. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 39, 91-106. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-012-0051-2>
- McClure, M., Tarr, P., Thompson, C. M., & Eckhoff, A. (2017). Defining quality in visual art education for young children: Building on the position statement of the Early Childhood Art Educators. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 118(3), 154-163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632913.2016.1245167>
- McFadyen Christensen, L., & Kirkland, L. D. (2009). Early childhood visual arts curriculum: Freeing spaces to express developmental and cultural palettes of mind. *Childhood Education*, 86(2), 87-91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2010.10523119>
- Miller, R. (1996). *The developmentally appropriate inclusive classroom in early education*. Albany, NY: Delmar.
- Morris, J. E., Lummis, G. W., McKinnon, D. H., & Heyworth, J. (2017). Measuring preservice teacher self-efficacy in music and visual arts: Validation of an amended science teacher efficacy belief instrument. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 64, 1-11. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.01.014>
- Novaković, S. (2015). Preschool teacher's role in the art activities of early and preschool age children. *Croatian Journal of Education*, 17(1), 153-163. <https://doi.org/10.15516/cje.v17i0.1497>
- Nutov, L. (2021). Integrating visual arts into the mathematics curriculum: The case of preservice teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 97, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103218>
- Oreck, B. (2006). Artistic choices: A study of teachers who use the arts in the classroom. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 7(8), 1-24. Retrieved from <http://www.ijea.org/v7n8> Access Date: 22/01/2022
- Özdemir, S., & Sezgin, F. (2011). Öğretmen adaylarının bireysel ve örgütsel değerler ile öğrencilerde görmek istedikleri değerlere ilişkin önem sırası algıları [Prospective teachers' perceptions of importance rankings on personal, organizational and student preferred values]. *Uşak University Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(2), 1-21. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/usaksosbil/issue/21648/232726> Access Date: 30/12/2021
- Öztürk Yılmaztekin, E., & Tantekin Erden, F. (2017). Investigating early childhood teachers' views on science teaching practices: The integration of science with visual art in early childhood settings. *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(7), 1194-1207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2016.1160899>
- Özkan, B., & Girgin, F. (2014). Okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin görsel sanat etkinliği uygulamalarını değerlendirmesi [Evaluation of virtual art activity applications by preschool teachers]. *Electronic Journal of Vocational Colleges*, 4(4), 79-85. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/ejovoc/issue/5396/73200> Access Date: 30/12/2021
- Rihter, J., & Potočnik, R. (2020). Preservice teachers' beliefs about teaching pupils with special educational needs in visual art education. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 37(2), 235-248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2020.1862340>
- Sağnak, M. (2005). İlköğretim okullarında görevli yönetici ve öğretmenlerin örgütsel değerlere ilişkin algıları [The perceptions related to organizational values of principals and teachers at primary schools]. *Education and Science*, 30(15), 50-57. Retrieved from <http://eb.ted.org.tr/index.php/EB/article/view/5051> Access Date: 23/11/2021
- Savas, H., Yalcin, S., & Satan, A. (2020). Effect of activity-based visual arts education program on social skill levels of children in need of protection for 7-12 age groups. *Educational Policy Analysis and Strategic Research*, 15(2), 166-187. <https://doi.org/10.29329/epasr.2020.251.9>

- Shulsky, D., & Kirkwood, D. (2015). Beyond tempera paint: Authentically exploring visual art in early childhood. *Childhood Education*, 91(5), 363-369. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2015.1090851>
- Schwarz, T., & Luckenbill, J. (2012). Let's get messy! Exploring sensory and art activities with infants and toddlers. *Young Children*, 67(4), 26-34. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/openview/b0163fd32> Access Date: 03/02/2022
- Schirmacher, R. (2006). *Art and creative development for young children*. (5th Edt.). USA: Thomson Delmar Learning.
- So, W. M., & Watkins, D. A. (2005). From beginning teacher education to professional teaching: A study of the thinking of Hong Kong primary science teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21, 525-541. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.03.003>
- Temiz, Z. (2017). Hangisi daha güzel? Yaratıcı sanata karşı kalıplaşmış sanat etkinlikleri [Which one is more beautiful? Creative arts versus stereotyped art activities]. *Journal of Inquiry Based Activities*, 7(2), 51-61. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/caf6/fa72b66332c8409d5a85f7b31eb1053c6c2e.pdf> Access Date: 03/02/2022
- The Ministry of National Education (MONE) (2013). Turkish 2013 Preschool Education Program. Ankara: MONE Printing House.
- The Ministry of National Education (MONE) (2006). Turkish 2006 Preschool Education Program. Ankara: MONE Printing House.
- The Ministry of National Education (MONE) (2002). Turkish 2002 Preschool Education Program. Ankara: MONE Printing House.
- Thobaben, A. M. (2013). The role of art and literacy activities in children's healing process. *Home Health Care Management & Practice*, 25(3) 123-125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1084822313476299>
- Thompson, C. M., & Bales, S. (1991). Michael doesn't like my dinosaurs: Conversations in a preschool art class. *Studies in Art Education*, 33(10), 43-55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.1991.11651857>
- Trent, J. (2013). Becoming a teacher educator: The multiple boundary-crossing experiences of beginning teacher educators. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 64(28), 262-275. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487112471998>
- Twigg, D., & Garvis, S. (2010). Exploring art in early childhood education. *The International Journal of The Arts in Society*, 5(2), 194-204. Retrieved from <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.977.3450&rep=rep1&type=pdf> Access Date: 03/02/2022
- Yazıcı, E. (2017). The impact of art education program on the social skills of preschool children. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 5(5), 17-26. <https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v5i5.2231>

Author Biography

Lütfiye Coşkun is an assistant professor doctor in the Department of Early Childhood Education at Kilis 7 Aralık University, Turkey. She completed her bachelor's degree in preschool education at İnönü University, Faculty of Education in 2007, her master's degree in preschool education at İnönü University in 2011, and a Ph.D. degree in preschool education at Gazi University in 2016. She had been at North Texas University as visiting scholar in 2015. Her research interests include preschool education, literacy skills in early childhood, on reading books to children.