

## Determining the opinions of prospective music teachers regarding preschool music education

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### Abstract

This study was conducted to determine the views of prospective music teachers on ‘early childhood music education, the course on early childhood music education, the planning and implementation of music activities for early childhood and working with preschool-aged children’. In the literature, the focus is generally on the perspectives of preschool teacher candidates regarding music education; however, this study offers a different point of view by directly focusing on the perspectives of music teacher candidates. In this way, it is believed that this study presents original findings that may contribute to the development of preschool music education, both in terms of the content of music teacher education programs and in the context of interdisciplinary collaboration. The participants of the study consisted of 13 prospective music teachers studying in the Department of Music Education at Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University. The data of the study were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques. The results of the research show that, while it was revealed that early childhood music education is generally considered valuable and necessary by the teacher candidates, it was also found that there is a need for improvement in areas such as the duration of the elective course they received in this field, the lack of practical applications, and their competencies in working with younger age groups. In line with these findings, it is recommended that interdisciplinary coordination be encourage between music education departments and early childhood education departments to promote integrated training models that reflect the realities of preschool teaching environments, and in-service training opportunities be provide for music teacher candidates and recent graduates to develop their competencies in early childhood music pedagogy, including classroom management, child psychology, and creative music-making strategies.

**Keywords:** Music education, teacher candidate, preschool, musical activities

### *Müzik öğretmen adaylarının okul öncesi müzik eğitimi ile ilgili görüşlerinin belirlenmesi*

#### Öz

*Bu araştırma, Müzik öğretmen adaylarının okul öncesi müzik eğitimi, okul öncesi müzik eğitimi dersi, okul öncesi müzik etkinliklerinin planlanması ve uygulanması ve okul öncesi çocuklarıyla çalışma konularındaki düşüncelerinin belirlenmesi amacıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Alanyazında, genellikle okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının müzik eğitimine bakışı incelenmekteyken, bu araştırma doğrudan müzik öğretmeni adaylarının perspektifine odaklanarak farklı bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır. Bu sayede hem müzik öğretmenliği programlarının içeriği hem de disiplinler arası iş birliği bağlamında okul öncesi müzik eğitiminin geliştirilmesine katkı sağlayacak özgün bulgular elde edildiği düşünülmektedir. Araştırmanın katılımcılarını Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi Müzik Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı’nda öğrenim görmekte olan 13 öğretmen adayı oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmanın verileri yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yoluyla toplanmış ve elde edilen veriler betimsel analiz tekniğiyle çözümlenmiştir. Sonuç olarak, okul öncesi müzik eğitiminin öğretmen adayları tarafından genel olarak değerli ve gerekli bulunduğunu ortaya koyarken, bu alanla ilgili aldıkları seçmeli dersin süresi, uygulama eksikliği ve küçük yaş grubuyla çalışma yeterlikleri gibi hususlarda gelişmeye ihtiyaç bulunduğunu göstermektedir. Bu bulgular doğrultusunda, müzik eğitimi bölümleri ile okul öncesi eğitim bölümleri arasında disiplinlerarası koordinasyonun teşvik edilmesi, okul öncesi öğretim ortamlarının gerçeklerini yansıtan bütünlüklü eğitim modellerinin geliştirilmesi önerilmektedir. Ayrıca, müzik öğretmeni adaylarının ve yeni mezunların sınıf yönetimi, çocuk psikolojisi ve yaratıcı müzik yapma stratejileri gibi okul öncesi müzik pedagojisine ilişkin yeterliklerini geliştirmelerine yönelik hizmet içi eğitim olanaklarının sunulması tavsiye edilmektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Müzik eğitimi, öğretmen adayı, okul öncesi, müzik etkinlikleri

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## INTRODUCTION

Music, regardless of its genre, emerges as one of the important elements present in an individual's life starting from the womb. The significance attributed to music has been substantiated through studies investigating its effects from developmental, social, cultural, and other perspectives (Flohr et al., 2000; Vaughn, 2000; Anvari et al., 2002; Črnčec et al., 2006; Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2011; Bačlija, 2019; Öztürk & Can, 2020).

With the guidance or support of parents, the foundations of a child's interaction with music can be laid at home starting from infancy (Sharman et al., 2023). This process, which begins with listening to music, can continue with attempts at singing and playing instruments. The home environment, which plays a crucial role in developing the child's interest in music, gradually gives way—starting from around 36 months—to the school environment, which is designed and implemented with structured educational programs aimed at supporting all developmental domains and meeting the child's socialization needs.

To support the child's development within a holistic framework, early childhood music education theories developed in the 20th century continue to evolve, supported by recent empirical work that underscores their relevance in contemporary settings. Gordon's Music Learning Theory (MLT), for instance, emphasizes audiation—the internal hearing of music—and is shown to be effective not only for musical ability but also for fostering social-emotional learning in young children, as Çenberci and Tufan (2023) report in their experimental study with first graders. Complementary to this, the Orff Schulwerk approach is being innovated and localized to better suit diverse cultural environments; as Hu and Kamarudin (2025) argue, modifications that honor elemental music, improvisatory learning, and embodied cognition help the Orff method remain robust in early childhood education. Similarly, comparative analyses (e.g. Zhou, 2022) of Kodály and Orff pedagogies with preschoolers indicate their adaptability and potential for enriching musical pedagogy when aligned with children's developmental stages and cultural context. Finally, systematic reviews (e.g. Gu & Koning, 2024) of empirical applications of Gordon's theory emphasize the increasing sophistication of tools for measuring musical aptitude and learning outcomes, and suggest that MLT's core principles continue to provide a valuable framework in both Eastern and Western schooling systems.

When examining early childhood education institutions in Türkiye, music activities are included alongside other types of activities in the educational program. The program also elaborates in detail on the developmental characteristics and domains of children aged 36–72

months, and includes numerous sample activity plans related to music education (Ministry of National Education, 2024). However, the mere inclusion of music activities in the curriculum is not sufficient. This is because the educational process is a whole, comprising the learning environment, the curriculum, the teacher, the student, materials, and teaching methods and techniques. While all of these components are important, the teacher component stands out more significantly, as the teacher is the one in direct contact with the child, who closely follows the child's development and learning process, implements the program, and prepares and conducts the music activities and materials (Turkish Education Association, 2009; Phajane, 2014; Acay Sözbir & Çamlıbel Çakmak, 2016; Patrick & Bakar, 2024). Emphasizing the need for intensive music education in early childhood, Flohr et al. (2000) and Yapalı et al. (2025) highlighted the necessity for teachers who conduct music activities in preschool institutions to be competent in this field.

In Türkiye, music activities—like science, math, Turkish language, visual arts, and other activities in the preschool curriculum—are carried out by preschool teachers. However, research shows that preschool teachers are not adequately competent in implementing music activities in terms of the time allocated in their plans, duration of application, instrument and vocal skills, knowledge of songs and musical works, music notation, song selection, and use of resources. In a study by Acay Sözbir and Çamlıbel Çakmak (2016), only three of the interviewed teachers reported including music activities daily; half of the teachers could not play any instrument; the others did not see themselves as competent; only two teachers incorporated voice/breathing exercises in song instruction; and most teachers relied on the internet as their primary resource.

Research by Salı et al. (2013) revealed that most preschool teachers feel inadequate in conducting music activities and express a need for in-service training in music education. Study by Kaya and Özkut (2017) also indicate that preschool teachers lack sufficient competence in areas such as resource use, song repertoire, instrument playing, the music education received during their undergraduate studies, and the frequency with which they include music activities in their lesson plans.

The inadequacy of preschool teachers in the knowledge and skills required to implement music activities raises the idea that these activities should be conducted by field experts, namely music teachers. Research findings and suggestions from Kurtaslan (2013), Tufan (2006), Şen (2016), and Kaya and Özkut (2017) also support this notion.

The current music education undergraduate curriculum shows that the course “Preschool Music Education” is offered only as an elective field education course for 2 hours per week during a single semester out of the entire four-year, eight-semester program (Council of Higher Education, 2018). Within the scope of this course, it does not appear feasible for instructors to provide sufficient practical examples suitable for the developmental characteristics of all preschool age groups or to allow for adequate practice. Although music teacher candidates are selected through a special talent exam and receive multi-dimensional specialization in music education, they do not receive specific training on the developmental characteristics of preschool children, specialized teaching methods for young children, classroom management, content selection, planning, and implementation. Moreover, since their teaching internships are conducted at the middle or high school levels, they remain distant from the context of teaching music to preschool children. As a result, even though some music teacher candidates may wish to work in preschool institutions after graduation, the limited duration of this course in their undergraduate education does not allow them to gain comprehensive knowledge and experience in preschool music education (Fidan et al., 2020), and many may feel inadequate in this area.

This sense of inadequacy is further compounded by the limited employment opportunities available to music teacher candidates and music teachers in pre-school education. After graduation, music teacher candidates in Türkiye are typically appointed to positions in primary or secondary education (Çoban, 2016). As a result, in some private preschools, music activities are conducted only within the scope of extracurricular club activities by music teachers who were not appointed through the formal public system. In other cases, where no music teacher is present at all, music-related activities are carried out by teachers from other subject areas, such as values education (Pektaş & Elmacı, 2023). This situation reflects a broader structural issue in early childhood education, where the lack of formally appointed music teachers leads to inconsistencies in the delivery and quality of music education in preschool settings.

Considering the critical importance of music education during the preschool period, and the current knowledge and skill levels of preschool teachers, it is proposed that music activities should be conducted by music teachers as field experts. Based on this idea, this study aims to determine the opinions of prospective music teachers regarding preschool music education within the context of the elective course “Preschool Music Education”. The study aims to answer the following research question: “What are the opinions of music teacher candidates regarding preschool music education?” Accordingly to this question, the study seeks to explore these sub-questions:

1. What are the perceptions of music teacher candidates regarding early childhood education?
2. What are the perceptions of music teacher candidates regarding the preschool music education course?
3. What are music teacher candidates' views on the planning and implementation of preschool music activities?
4. What are music teacher candidates' views on working with preschool children?

## **METHOD**

### **Research design**

This study is a descriptive research aimed at portraying the current situation and is structured based on qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is defined as a process in which data is collected through techniques such as observation, interviews, and document analysis, and where individuals' perceptions and events are examined in a holistic and realistic manner within their natural environments (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008).

### **Participants**

When determining the study group of the research, the criterion sampling method, one of the purposive sampling strategies, was used. This method involves the deliberate selection of individuals, cases, objects, or situations that meet specific criteria directly related to the research problem (Büyüköztürk, et al., 2009).

In the study, the main criteria determined by the researcher for selecting the teacher candidates to be interviewed were that the participants were enrolled in the Department of Music Education and had taken the elective course 'Preschool Music Education' during that academic year. This criterion was chosen because their interest, knowledge, and experience related to preschool music education were assumed to be more up-to-date, given that they were currently enrolled in the course.

The participants of the study consisted of 13 second-year teacher candidates at Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University who were taking the elective course "Preschool Music Education." Only two of the teacher candidates stated that they had previously had the opportunity to work with children. One of these candidates had conducted short-term activities for about half a semester (approximately 7 weeks) in a private preschool institution, while the other had such an experience for only three days.

### **Data collection**

The data for this research were collected at the end of May in the 2023 academic year. Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Human Research in Social Sciences at Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University (Protocol No. 2023/111). In the data collection process, the semi-structured interview technique, one of the interview methods, was used. Semi-structured interviews, due to their certain level of standardization and flexibility, help overcome the limitations of tests and questionnaires based solely on writing and filling out forms and facilitate in-depth understanding of a particular topic (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). In this type of interview, participants are allowed to express their experiences, thoughts, and perceptions in detail through pre-prepared open-ended questions (Bailey, 2008).

When developing a semi-structured interview form in research, it is recommended to seek expert opinion, ensure that the questions are clear and understandable and align with the research objective (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

To ensure the content validity of the interview form, it was submitted for review to two field experts. Based on their feedback, the final version of the form was prepared. Teacher candidates were first asked for interview appointments outside of class hours at times and days convenient for them, and one-on-one interviews were conducted at the scheduled times. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and was recorded using a voice recorder. The opinions of the teacher candidates in this study were limited to the answers they gave to the questions in the semi-structured interview form.

### **Data analysis**

To analyze the data obtained from the teacher candidates' responses recorded during the interviews, the descriptive analysis technique was used. Through descriptive analysis, the data were summarized and interpreted. In descriptive analysis, raw data are presented in an organized and interpreted manner that is understandable to the reader. For this purpose, the data are structured according to the themes derived from the research questions and presented in accordance with the questions used in the interviews. In descriptive analysis, direct quotations are frequently included in order to vividly reflect the views of the interviewees (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008).

In this study as well, the questions asked to the teacher candidates were identified as the main themes. Firstly, the interview transcripts were carefully read and meaningful expressions were identified. These expressions were then coded in accordance with the aim of the study.

Afterwards, similar codes were grouped together to form themes. The responses were evaluated in line with these themes, with particular emphasis placed on recurring ideas, and the teacher candidates' opinions were presented accordingly. While presenting their views, direct quotations were used within quotation marks and interpreted accordingly.

## **FINDINGS**

This section presents the findings obtained from the interviews conducted with music teacher candidates. The participants' opinions were coded without using their real names, in accordance with confidentiality principles. Accordingly, the participants were coded as "TC" to represent "Teacher Candidate," and each participant was assigned a number such as "TC1, TC2, TC3," etc. The findings are presented in order based on the interview questions.

### **Opinions on preschool music education**

Theme: The role of music education in holistic child development

Codes: Holistic development, cognitive support, emotional development, social skills enhancement, motor skill development, language development and educational foundation.

All of the teacher candidates participating in the study stated that they considered preschool music education important in terms of supporting all areas of child development. Sample statements from the teacher candidates are as follows:

**TC2:** *"I believe music activities affect all areas of children's development. For example, a child can sing and dance at the same time. It contributes to both language and motor development. Of course, it also supports cognitive and social development."*

**TC6:** *"How could there be preschool education without music activities? Music activities are very important because they support all developmental areas. Vocabulary expands when children sing songs, they socialize when singing with their friends, memory improves, and they show cognitive development. Playing rhythm instruments also supports psychomotor development, I think."*

**TC9:** *"Preschool music activities are, in my opinion, very important and necessary. They contribute greatly to children's social, cognitive, motor, and language development."*

**TC13:** *"Through music activities, children can express their emotions more comfortably. Singing in a group or playing rhythm instruments in turns teaches cooperation, listening, and waiting for their turn. Memorizing lyrics and following rhythm also support cognitive development. So, it positively affects all areas of development."*

### **Opinions on the elective course “preschool music education”**

Themes: Perceived benefits of the course, identified limitations in course structure.

Codes: Positive overall perception of the course, limited course duration, desire for more hands-on experience, course content mostly theoretical and need for alignment with real classroom settings

All of the teacher candidates expressed positive opinions about the course. However, some shortcomings were also identified, such as the limited duration of the course (mentioned by TC1, TC4, TC5, TC6, TC8, TC10, TC11), and the lack of practical applications, with the course being mostly theoretical (mentioned by TC1, TC2, TC3, TC5, TC7, TC8, TC11, TC12). Some of their statements include:

**TC1:** *“Thanks to this course, I learned many things I didn’t know about preschool children. I’m generally successful in my courses and with my instrument, but when you, as the instructor, said ‘play this children’s song,’ my hands just froze. I think this course should be offered across more semesters. Because I don’t think any of us really know how to conduct activities with children. We tried to do some practical work, but I don’t think it was enough.”*

**TC8:** *“It was very helpful in terms of learning about children’s developmental characteristics. I learned how to plan activities and adapt them according to age groups. But since I didn’t have children in front of me, I couldn’t apply anything directly. I don’t know what would happen if I did the activities with real kids. Also, I think we didn’t have enough time. Yes, we gained knowledge, but we couldn’t fully apply what we learned.”*

**TC11:** *“The course was fun and educational for me. Sometimes even surprising. I realized that what we already know isn’t known by children, and we need to teach it through very different methods, like games. That challenged me a bit, but trying to see things from a different perspective really added a lot. I would have liked the course to be more practice-oriented, but even the time we had (one semester, two hours per week) wasn’t enough to fully learn the theoretical content.”*

**TC12:** *“This course felt very different but useful and practical. I’ve already started using what I learned with my nieces. During the semester, we were informed about preschool children and the features of music activities, but I wish we had also had the chance to work with real children.”*



### **Opinions on planning and implementing preschool music activities**

Themes: Planning confidence and challenges, implementation competence in practice.

Codes: No difficulty in planning, difficulty in planning for younger age groups and lack of confidence/competence in implementation.

Most teacher candidates (TC2, TC3, TC4, TC6, TC7, TC8, TC9, TC11, TC12) stated that they did not experience difficulties in planning preschool music activities. However, four candidates (TC1, TC5, TC10, TC13) indicated that they found it challenging to plan music activities for younger age groups. The majority of candidates (TC1, TC3, TC4, TC5, TC6, TC7, TC8, TC9, TC10, TC11, TC13) reported that they did not feel very competent in implementing music activities with children. Examples of their responses include:

**TC3:** *“I’ve learned how to plan music activities for children, I don’t have major issues with it. But I lack confidence when it comes to actually conducting the activities — like engaging the kids, choosing the right method, adjusting the activity duration. I’m not very good at it for now.”*

**TC7:** *“I can plan music activities easily. But I’m not sure what would happen if I were face-to-face with children. I think I would struggle.”*

**TC10:** *“Planning music activities for children is really difficult for me. I always get confused about how to convey the topic. I think I keep designing the activities for older age groups. I might even say I’m afraid of working with children — I don’t think I’m very competent when it comes to preschool music education.”*

### **Opinions on working with preschool children in their teaching careers**

Theme: Career preferences regarding early childhood education.

Codes: Willing to work with preschool children and not willing to work with preschool children.

Most of the teacher candidates (TC2, TC3, TC4, TC6, TC7, TC8, TC9, TC11, TC12) expressed that they would consider working with preschool children after graduation. However, four teacher candidates (TC1, TC5, TC10, TC13) stated that they would prefer not to work with younger age groups. Sample responses are:

**TC2:** *“In the future, I’d love to work with children in my teaching career. I think it would be really fun for me. Also, the thought of contributing to them makes me very happy.”*

**TC9:** *“I would definitely want to teach music to preschool children.”*

**TC11:** *“I could work with preschool children. But I think I’ll need to improve myself a bit more.”*

**TC13:** *“It’s a nice and different field, but I wouldn’t want to do music activities with children. I think I’d get along better with older age groups.”*

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In line with the findings obtained from this study, it was observed that all teacher candidates who took the preschool music education course consider the course highly important in terms of supporting all areas of child development. This reveals that teacher candidates recognize the holistic contribution of music education not only to cognitive development but also to social, emotional, psychomotor, and language development.

Although all participants generally expressed positive views about the course, some structural limitations were also highlighted. Many teacher candidates stated that the duration of the course was insufficient and that the content mostly remained theoretical. These findings indicate that the teacher candidates were expecting a more practice-based learning process, and that this expectation was not met. Similarly, Kurtaslan (2013) also found that preschool music education courses often remain theoretical, with limited practical components, and are considered insufficient in terms of duration.

While most teacher candidates reported that they felt competent in planning preschool music activities, the fact that some participants expressed difficulty particularly in planning activities for younger age groups suggests a need for more support in age-appropriate activity planning. Similar findings were reported in related research: non-music-specialist preschool teachers who underwent focused practicum and reflection as part of a music-based language program experienced substantial increases in music teaching self-efficacy (TeeNa Sim & Lee, 2024). Likewise, pre-service music teachers reflected on their practicum experiences as a mix of strengths and challenges, particularly regarding applying methods, managing classrooms, and using materials—underscoring the gap between theoretical preparation and practical capability (Aras, 2024). Furthermore, contrary to the findings of Fidan et al. (2020), a significant number of teacher candidates in this study stated that they do not feel sufficiently competent in implementing music activities with children. This directly reflects the lack of practical experience in the course and affects teacher candidates’ perceived professional competence in the field.

When examining the participants' expressions regarding their post-graduation goals, it was seen that the majority of teacher candidates are willing to carry out music activities with preschool children. However, four teacher candidates stated that they did not want to work with younger age groups. This finding shows that there are differences in teacher candidates' preferences regarding age groups, and that their professional orientation toward early childhood education is shaped by various factors. In his research, Şen (2016) concluded that music teacher candidates who specialize in music education have doubts about their knowledge related to preschool education, and likewise, preschool teacher candidates have doubts about their knowledge in the field of music education. The same situation may apply to the participants of this study. Duru and Köse (2012) also emphasized that music education departments train a single type of music teacher, and that subdivisions offering different educational processes based on age groups should be established. The findings of Yapalı et al. (2025) further idealize the role of the preschool music teacher, demonstrating that in order to effectively conduct music activities in early childhood, teachers must not only be experts in music, but also possess the capacity to implement an interdisciplinary program developed through the collaboration of specialists in child development and other related fields.

In conclusion, while this study reveals that teacher candidates generally find preschool music education valuable and necessary, it also shows that there is a need for improvement in areas such as course duration, practical application, and competencies related to working with young children.

### **Recommendations**

In line with these findings, it is recommended that:

- The “Preschool Music Education” course, offered as an elective field course within the Departments of Music Education, be restructured in terms of duration and content;
- The course be integrate more practice-oriented content within the curriculum by incorporating classroom simulations, micro-teaching sessions, and field-based observations in preschool settings.
- The course be supported with practice-based activities, and teacher candidates be given internship opportunities in preschool education institutions;
- Sub-divisions be established within the Departments of Music Education to address different age groups, such as “Preschool Music Teaching,” “Primary School Music Teaching,” and “Middle School Music Teaching”;
- Interdisciplinary coordination be encourage between music education departments and early childhood education departments to promote integrated training models that reflect the realities of preschool teaching environments.

- In-service training opportunities be provide for music teacher candidates and recent graduates to develop their competencies in early childhood music pedagogy, including classroom management, child psychology, and creative music-making strategies.
- Music activities in preschool education institutions be carried out by music teachers who are experts in the field.
- The research can also be conducted with teacher candidates from other music education departments in order to enhance the diversity of ideas.

#### **Limitations and strengths**

The study was limited to 13 teacher candidates. The reason for this limitation is the decline in the number of students admitted to the Department of Music Education in recent years.

The strength of the study can be explained as follows: identifying that music teacher candidates lack sufficient knowledge and skills regarding the age groups for whom music education may be most critical will provide valuable insights for future undergraduate curricula and teaching practices.

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|---|---|------------------------------------|
| Fikir ve Kavramsal Örgü<br><i>Idea or Notion</i>  | Araştırma hipotezini veya fikrini oluşturmak<br><i>Form the research hypothesis or idea</i>         | Senem ACAY SÖZBİR                  |
| Tasarım<br><i>Design</i>  | Yöntem ve araştırma desenini tasarlamak<br><i>To design the method and research design.</i>         | Senem ACAY SÖZBİR                  |
| Literatür Tarama<br><i>Literature Review</i>  | Çalışma için gerekli literatürü taramak<br><i>Review the literature required for the study</i>      | Senem ACAY SÖZBİR                  |
| Veri Toplama ve İşleme<br><i>Data Collecting and Processing</i>   | Verileri toplamak, düzenlemek ve raporlaştırmak<br><i>Collecting, organizing and reporting data</i> | Senem ACAY SÖZBİR                  |
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