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## **WHO IS A GOOD PRESCHOOL TEACHER? PERCEPTIONS OF KINDERGARTEN ADMINISTRATORS, PRESCHOOL TEACHERS, PROSPECTIVE PRESCHOOL TEACHERS AND PARENTS ON THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD PRESCHOOL TEACHER**

*(Research article)*

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# WHO IS A GOOD PRESCHOOL TEACHER? PERCEPTIONS OF KINDERGARTEN ADMINISTRATORS, PRESCHOOL TEACHERS, PROSPECTIVE PRESCHOOL TEACHERS AND PARENTS ON THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD PRESCHOOL TEACHER

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## Abstract

The present study aims to investigate perceptions of kindergarten administrators, preschool teachers, prospective preschool teachers and parents on the characteristics of a good preschool teacher. The phenomenology was used in the study as a qualitative research design. 11 kindergarten administrators working in kindergartens in a city center located in the Central Anatolia Region, 17 preschool teachers, 21 prospective preschool teachers continuing their training in the same city and 21 parents whose children attend kindergarten participated in the study. An interview form consisting semi-structured interview questions was used as a data collection tool. The data were analyzed by descriptive and content analysis methods. Findings of the study revealed participants' expressions regarding their perception about a good preschool teacher's personal characteristics, professional characteristics and approaches towards the child. Participants stated that the rationales for being a good teacher are to have a child-centered approach as well as the professional characteristics and the experience. In order to be a good preschool teacher, participants suggested that professional development opportunities should be provided to teachers, the teachers should have a child-centered approach, teacher's personal characteristics should be taken into account, pre-service education should be efficient, attention must be paid to teacher's professional attitudes and a cooperation with the parents should be established.

*Keywords: preschool, good teacher, school administrator, preschool teacher, prospective teachers, parent*

## 1. Introduction

Preschool is a significant period in which most of the cognitive, linguistic, socio-emotional and motor developments of children take place and their personality is formed to a large extent (Ministry of National Education (MEB), 2013). The basic knowledge, skills and habits acquired and developed in this period have a lifelong effect (Ari, 2003; Gmleksiz & Serhatliođlu, 2013). Healthy growth and development of preschool children, as well as their ability to develop a positive attitude towards learning, depend on providing the child with quality cognitive stimuli, rich language interactions, positive social and emotional experiences and creating an environment in which the child's independence is supported (MEB, 2013).

It has been proven that the preschool education contributes to later education levels. For this reason, many governments across the world have invested more in preschool education in the recent years (Yoshikawa & Kabay, 2015). It is known that the preschool education provides short and long term benefits for children (Campbell et al., 2012; Gormley, Gayer, Phillips & Dawson, 2005). During preschool period children learn to share, to collaborate, to socialize and to cooperate (MEB, 2013), to communicate and to exhibit healthy behavior in

addition to acquiring daily skills (Yoldaş, Yetim & Küçükoğlu, 2016). A good preschool education creates educational, social and financial benefits in the long term (Barnett, 2003). In addition to this, a good preschool education can improve the effects of disadvantages and it produces positive results not only for the children but also for the parents and the society (Vandell & Wolfe, 2000).

For a good preschool education mostly; the importance of the curriculum, personnel characteristics, teachers' behaviors, teachers' practices, staff-child interaction, family participation and structural characteristics of the environment is emphasized (Veisson & Kabaday, 2018). Previous research on preschool education quality show that good teachers are one of the main factors determining the quality in preschools (NAEYC, 2006). Success of preschool education largely depends on the quality of the teachers. Therefore, it is considered that preschool teachers are positioned in the center of a good preschool education (Whitebook & Ryan, 2011). Moreover, politicians, administrators, parents, preschool teachers and university instructors consider qualifications of teachers as a fundamental component that affects children's learning and development and improves the results for children (Sandberg & Vuorinen 2007). The results of a growing number of studies also show that teacher quality is the most important educational factor that predicts student outcomes (Goldhaber, 2002, 2007; Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005; Wright, Horn & Sanders, 1997). The importance of the characteristics of a good preschool teacher would become clear by an evaluation of this situation. In the literature, the terms highly qualified teacher, teacher of high quality, professional teacher and effective teacher are used interchangeably when referring to the notion of good teacher. The concept of 'good teacher' is preferred in the present study.

There are various opinions regarding the characteristics of a good teacher due to the fact that the concept of good teacher has been discussed ideologically (Cochran-Smith, 2004), culturally and contextually. Opinions concerning the concept of good teacher have been a subject of discussion since ancient times. Educational philosophers and *raisonneurs* have identified images for good teachers within the framework of teachers' general image, basic qualities and values. A teacher has been seen as an artist (Plato), a culture supplier (Cicero), a person who focuses on teaching discipline (Breiter), a role model (Aristotle), an experimentalist (Locke), an educator (Watson), an educator compatible with the nature (Rousseau), a creator (Luvenfeld), a socialist (Barth), a child-centered person and (Neill) a postmodernist (Foucault) (Palmer, 2003; cited in Arnon & Reichel, 2007). Recent changes and developments in the world require the re-establishment of good teacher properties. This can be seen as an important opportunity given the fact that the quality of the teacher is the most significant school factor explaining differences in children's performance. Good teachers certainly make a difference; however, the answer to what constitutes the characteristics of a good teacher is an unclear one (Goldhaber, 2002), and also it is a difficult one to determine.

Many researchers (Johansson, 2003; Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, 2011; Sylva et al. 2010 cited in Lillvist, Sandberg, Sheridan & Williams, 2014; Sheridan, Williams, Sandberg & Vuorinen, 2011) stated that the basic requirements for being a good teacher are content knowledge, pedagogical approach, learning tendency and attitudes. Among the requirements of a good preschool education institution, the field competencies of preschool teachers are an important element (Saracho & Spodek, 2007). Personality of the preschool teacher holds importance as it directly affects the interaction between teacher and child as well as the climate of the kindergarten group (Bauer, 2008 cited in Tatalović Vorkapić, 2012). Studies showed that the learning and development of children depend on the educational qualifications of their teachers (Barnett, 2003). Marton (1980) states that teachers are required to develop at least four competencies. First of these is personal competencies

including abilities such as creating an effective communication and interaction with the children and being a part of their lives. The second is pedagogical competence which includes knowledge regarding how children learn and develop. The third is sufficient content knowledge, in other words, the real knowledge that the teachers have on the content that they want the children to learn. The final competence is the didactic competence that includes the ability to create conditions for children's learning in different fields (Sheridan et al., 2011). The Ministry of National Education has determined 14 areas of competence for preschool teaching in 2015. "Competence areas" consist of "Competences" for each area and "Performance Indicators" for each competency, graded as A1, A2, A3 (Ministry of Education (MEB), 2008).

The impact of a good preschool teacher on children is undeniably important. It has been shown that the children educated by good teachers become more social, exhibit a more advanced language use and show a higher performance in cognitive tasks (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001; Dwyer, Chait & McKee, 2000; Howes, 1997; cited in Ryan & Ackerman, 2004). Previous studies show that a good preschool teacher can improve children's attitudes and self-esteem towards lifelong learning as well as their learning and academic success (Andersson 1992; Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford & Howes, 2002; NICHD, 2005).

There are studies that report the characteristics good teachers have (Howes, James & Ritchie, 2003; Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson 2009; Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, 2011; Sheridan, Pramling Samuelsson & Johansson, 2009; Sommer, Pramling Samuelsson & Hundeide, 2010; Strange, 2002; Thompson, Greer & Greer, 2004; Wong & Wong, 1991). For instance; curriculum knowledge (Sommer et al., 2010), ability to create a multidisciplinary learning environment (Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, 2011), ability to integrate play and learning (Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2009), and being able to conduct joint and supportive interactions (Syslová, 2019) between children (Howes et al., 2003) and teachers (Sheridan et al., 2009) have emerged as good teacher characteristics. There are studies that examine the characteristics of a good preschool teacher according to the opinions of school principals (Tanhan & Delen, 2019), preschool teachers (Nasiopoulou, Williams, Sheridan & Hansen, 2017; Sheridan et al., 2011; Veisson & Kabaday, 2018), prospective teachers (Lillvist, Sandberg, Sheridan & Williams, 2014) and parents (Bassok, Markowitz, Player & Zagardo, 2017; Howes, Whitebook & Phillips, 1992). Although there are many research conducted in Turkey on the characteristics of a good teacher; only two studies were found with regards to the characteristics of preschool teachers. One of these two studies is the study conducted by Veisson and Kabaday (2018) on how preschool teachers in Estonia and Turkey perceive professionalism while the other is Tanhan and Delen's (2019) study that aimed to determine the ideal teacher perceptions of school principals working in kindergartens. Determining the characteristics of a good preschool teacher from a single source has its limitations. More and better indicators can be provided by identifying the characteristics of a good preschool teacher with data collected from multiple sources (Peterson, 2000). For this reason, a different perspective is needed. Additionally, no holistic study has been found which investigates how a good preschool teacher is perceived by administrators, teachers, prospective teachers and parents. In this respect, mutual opinions are needed.

The present study is important for several reasons as it is the first study to investigate the characteristics of a good preschool teacher in line with the opinions of administrators, preschool teachers, prospective preschool teachers and parents. The results of this study are going to provide a clearer understanding of the characteristics of a good preschool teacher by revealing the perceptions of administrators, teachers, prospective teachers and parents of a good preschool teacher in a holistic way. The results of the study will also contribute to

improving the quality of schools and education. It is also considered important in terms of revealing the opinions of the participants about good teachership due to the fact that they express their opinions without any direction or limitation. School administrators work very closely with the teachers and the students on a daily basis. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the administrators' perceptions of good teachers because this perception affects how the administrators serve their role as an education leader. The information regarding the extent to which teachers have these characteristics will enable teachers to evaluate themselves and provide concrete data on the subjects they need support. It also will enable revealing the occupational perceptions of preschool teachers and the effect of the teacher training process on these perceptions. Understanding the prospective teachers' perception of a good teacher shall enable us to understand who the future teachers are, what affects their behaviors and what is the professional ideal that they attribute to a good teacher. It is a known fact that all parents look for a "good teacher" when they send their children to a preschool, it's logical. For this reason, it is important to reveal the parents' perception of good teachers. Although there is general consensus that a good preschool teacher has a significant impact on preschool education and children, there is no consensus on what the characteristics of a good preschool teacher are. This uncertainty creates a need for research in this particular area.

The present study was conducted with the aim of determining the perceptions of administrators, preschool teachers, prospective preschool teachers and parents about the characteristics of a good preschool teacher. The following questions were investigated within the scope of the study:

1. What are the characteristics of a good preschool teacher?
2. What criteria do the administrators, preschool teachers, prospective preschool teachers and parents consider when determining the characteristics of a good preschool teacher?
3. What are the administrators, preschool teachers, prospective preschool teachers and parents' suggestions for being a good preschool teacher?

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Research Design*

The present study, which aimed to determine the perceptions of preschool administrators, preschool teachers, prospective preschool teachers and parents about the characteristics of a good preschool teacher, was designed in accordance with the qualitative approach. Qualitative approach allows perceiving environment, experiences and or phenomena as well as revealing interpretations of thereof and collecting broader and more flexible data (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2013). The phenomenology design was used in the study as a qualitative research design. Phenomenology studies aim to explain individuals' perceptions of phenomena, the meanings they attribute to phenomena and their emotions about the phenomena (Patton, 2014). Phenomenology constitutes an appropriate research ground for the studies that allow us to investigate the phenomena that are not completely unfamiliar to us but that we do not have in-depth knowledge about (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Phenomenological design focuses on views and experiences of the participants (Cresswell, 2012). In this context; with the phenomenon of 'preschool teacher', which we are familiar with but do not have in-depth knowledge of, it is aimed to explain the perceptions of experienced school administrators, preschool teachers, prospective preschool teachers and parents regarding the characteristics of a good preschool teacher.

## 2.2. Participants

The study was conducted with the participation of 11 kindergarten administrators working in kindergartens in a city center located in the central region of Turkey, 17 preschool teachers working in these schools, 21 prospective preschool teachers continuing their fourth year preschool teachership training in the same city and 21 parents whose children attend kindergarten. According to Glesne (2012), in phenomenological research it is preferred working with small groups of 5-25 people who are experienced in the subject. Maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2014), which is one of the purposive sampling methods, is used in the formation of the study group. It is possible to use maximum variation sampling in qualitative research for the purpose of understanding the phenomena more in depth, reflecting the diversity of the individuals who have experience regarding the phenomenon, identifying common and shared points among varying events and determining different dimensions of the phenomenon (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Within this scope, all of volunteering school administrators and preschool teachers working in kindergartens in the city center and all of volunteering prospective preschool teachers and three parents from each kindergarten were included in the study. All of the preschool administrators who participated in the study held a Bachelor's Degree, while seven of them were school principals, four were vice-principals and six were female and five were male. Administrators' age range was between 21-49 years, their professional experience range was between 6-29 years and their administrative experience range was between 4-13 years. All of the preschool teachers had an undergraduate degree and all of them were female. Preschool teachers' age varied between 30-47 years while their professional experience varied between 6-16 years. All of the prospective preschool teachers have been continuing their last year studies in teachership education. While 19 of the prospective preschool teachers were female, two were male and their age ranged between 21-23 years. Of the parents, 18 were female and three were male and their age range was 25- 44 years. One of the parents held a master's degree, six held undergraduate degree, eight held two-year degree while six of them held a secondary education level diploma. 13 of the parents were housewives and six were employees. Two of the working parents are teachers, two are health workers, two are government employees, one is a police officer and one is a shopkeeper.

## 2.3. Data Collection

In the present study the data was collected from kindergarten administrators working in kindergartens affiliated to the Provincial Directorate of National Education, preschool teachers working in kindergartens, prospective preschool teachers studying in the fourth grade and parents whose children attend kindergarten. The data were obtained with semi-structured interview questions developed by the investigator. The data obtained from the interviews were recorded. Within this context, 35 pages of interview texts were extracted.

A literature search was conducted in the process of creating the interview questions. Seven open-ended questions were prepared in this direction. The prepared open-ended questions were submitted to the expert opinion of four academicians in the field of preschool education. The interview questions were reduced to three upon expert academicians' feedback and the interview form was shaped to its final form. It was concluded that the interview form consisting of three questions was suitable for use after the preliminary interviews conducted with two administrators, two preschool teachers, two prospective teachers and two parents. The following questions were asked to the participants:

- 1- What are the characteristics that a good preschool teacher should have?

2- What were your rationales when specifying the features that a good preschool teacher should have?

3- What can be done to be a good preschool teacher?

#### *2.4. Data Analysis*

The data of the study were analyzed with descriptive and content analysis techniques. Data was presented according to previously created themes in descriptive analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In the present study as well, extroversion/assertiveness, agreeableness/compatibleness, conscientiousness/self-control, emotional stability/neuroticism, and openness to experience categories created by Goldberg (1990) were used as personality dimensions. Other data were consisted of categories and themes that were previously subjected to content analysis. Content analysis requires the obtained data to be analyzed in depth. Novel themes, categories and dimension that are not pre-existent emerge through content analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). An inductive approach was used in content analysis. Inductive data analysis is a process that involves dividing data into units and creating categories with the purpose of bringing hidden information into view (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Concepts and themes are made more clearly visible by inductive analysis (Glesne, 2012; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Codes were produced directly from the data by the conducted inductive analysis and the categories under which the codes would be presented were determined. Similarities and differences were discovered by examining the relationship between the categories and the themes that would compose the study results were created. Effort was made that the themes were as descriptive as possible in the reporting of the themes and direct quotes from the interviews were used. Frequencies and percentages were used in the presentation of the themes and categories. In the analysis, codes A1, A2, ... were used for administrators, T1, T2, ... were used for preschool teachers, PT1, PT2, ... were used for prospective preschool teachers and F1,F2, ..., were used for parents and the data were presented accordingly.

#### *2.5. Validity and Reliability*

Validity and reliability are important concerns regarding the scientific research steps of forming the conceptual framework, collecting data, analyzing data and presenting findings (Merriam, 2013). In qualitative research, the terms credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are used instead of validity and reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In terms of credibility; participant information, stages of the research, data collection tools and data analysis process are explained in detail. In addition, the study was examined by an expert, whose feedback was also taken into account. In order to enhance transferability, direct quotes were used in the findings and the details of the process were presented with descriptions. At the same time, purposive sampling method was used in order to ensure the transferability. One of the most effective ways to increase reliability in qualitative studies is to provide consensus among coders (Huberman & Miles, 2002). Accordingly, codes and categories were created by the investigator during the data analysis process while the same process was carried out by a researcher with a doctorate degree in preschool education and the consistency between the coders was examined. The reliability of the data analysis was calculated using Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula as in  $\text{Percent of Agreement} = [\text{Agreements} / (\text{Agreements} + \text{Disagreements}) \times 100]$  and the percent of agreement was found to be 89%. According to Şencan (2005), a consensus percentage of 70% and above refers to an appropriate level of reliability. Finally, expert review and evaluation process was carried out for ensuring confirmability. The compatibility of the raw data with the findings can be confirmed by interviews and discussions with expert colleagues (Merriam, 2013). In this context, the study was examined by an expert and feedback from the said expert was taken

into account. In addition, all information and documents collected during the research process were archived.

### 3. Findings

In the present study, which was carried out to determine the perceptions of school administrators, preschool teachers, prospective preschool teachers and parents regarding the characteristics of a good preschool teacher, the findings were presented under three headings: 'Characteristics of a good preschool teacher', 'Rationales for determining the characteristics of a good preschool teacher' and 'Suggestions for being a good preschool teacher' within the framework of the research questions.

#### 3.1. Findings Regarding the Characteristics of a Good Preschool Teacher

Table 1. *Emerging themes and categories regarding the characteristics of a good preschool teacher*

Theme	Category	Administrator		Teacher		Prospective Teacher		Parent	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Personal Characteristics									
	Openness to Experience	8	73	10	59	10	48	2	10
	Extroversion/Assertiveness	9	82	12	71	15	71	11	52
	Agreeableness/Compatibleness	6	55	7	41	11	52	12	57
	Conscientiousness/Self-Control	2	18	4	24	3	14	6	29
	Emotional Stability	1	9	2	12	3	14	-	-
	Total	10	91	15	88	20	95	18	86
Professional Characteristics									
	Professional Knowledge	3	27	7	41	7	33	4	19
	Professional Skill	5	45	5	29	8	38	1	5
	Professional Attitude	3	27	1	6	1	5	2	10
	Cooperation with Parent	1	9	-	-	-	-	3	14
	Total	8	73	8	47	14	67	7	33
Approach/Attitude towards Child									
	Approach/Attitude towards Child	3	27	4	24	7	33	6	29

As it can be seen in Table 1, the characteristics of a good preschool teacher were examined in three themes of personal characteristics, professional characteristics and approach/attitude towards the child.



The personal characteristics theme was composed of openness to experience, extroversion/assertiveness, agreeableness/compatibleness, conscientiousness/self-control and emotional stability categories. The personal characteristics theme was stated by 10 (91%) administrators, 15 (88%) teachers, 20 (95%) prospective teachers and 18 (86%) parents. Personal characteristics were expressed at similar rates by almost all of the participants. Openness to experience category was composed by codes of openness to development, openness to development, openness to change, openness to novelty, self-improvement, researcher, creative, curious, foresighted, questioning and intelligent. Openness to development was expressed by 8 (73%) administrators, 10 (59%) teachers, 10 (48%) prospective teachers and 2 (10%) parents. While openness to development was mostly emphasized by the administrators, it was least expressed by the parents. Extroversion/assertiveness category was composed by codes of smiling, affectionate, cheerful, warm-blooded, empathetic, communicative, active/energetic, sincere, humorous, open to communication, self-confident, social, lively, sympathetic and suave. Extroversion/assertiveness was stated by 9 (82%) administrators, 12 (71%) teachers, 15 (71%) prospective teachers and 11 (52%) parents. While extroversion/assertiveness was mostly expressed by the administrators, it was least emphasized by the parents. Agreeableness/compatibleness category was composed by codes of patient, tolerant/understanding, altruistic, calm, flexible, compassionate, respectful and gentle. Agreeableness/compatibleness was expressed by 6 (55%) administrators, 7 (41%) teachers, 11 (52%) prospective teachers and 12 (57%) parents. While agreeableness/compatibleness was expressed by the administrators, prospective teachers and parents in close proportions, it was less emphasized by the teachers. Category of conscientiousness/self-control was composed by codes of devoted, responsible, reliable, careful, foresighted, hardworking, disciplined, determined and productive. Conscientiousness/self-control was expressed by 2 (18%) administrators, 4 (24%) teachers, 3 (14%) prospective teachers and 6 (29%) parents. While conscientiousness/self-control was mostly expressed by the parents, it was least emphasized by the prospective teachers. Emotional stability category was composed by codes of consistency, composure, being at peace with oneself and not being judgmental. Emotional stability was stated by 1 (9%) administrator, 2 (12%) teachers and 3 (14%) prospective teachers. Emotional stability was most expressed by prospective teachers, but not by parents.

Professional characteristics theme included professional knowledge, professional skill, professional attitude and cooperation with parent categories. The professional characteristics theme was expressed by 8 (73%) administrators, 8 (47%) teachers, 14 (67%) prospective teachers and 7 (33%) parents. Professional characteristics were emphasized mostly by the administrators and least by the parents. Professional knowledge category was composed by codes of being professionally equipped, being knowledgeable/expert in the field, being knowledgeable with the developmental areas/characteristics of children, being knowledgeable with the interests and needs of children, being equipped to get to know children, being well-educated, being knowledgeable with child psychology, being knowledgeable with the personality of children, having information about child nutrition and health. The professional knowledge was stated by 3 (27%) administrators, 7 (41%) teachers, 7 (33%) prospective teachers and 4 (19%) parents. While professional knowledge was expressed mostly by the teachers, it was emphasized least by the parents. Professional skill category was composed by codes of being able to use technology, enabling children to like school, organizing fun activities, having the ability to observe, solving problems, having a good and fun time with children, working in a planned manner according to the developmental characteristics of children, creating an environment for children to learn while having fun with different methods, finding practical solutions, evaluating children effectively, being capable of attracting children's attention and being solution-oriented. Professional skill

was expressed by 5 (45%) administrators, 5 (29%) teachers, 8 (38%) prospective teachers and 1 (5%) parents. While professional skill was most emphasized by the administrators, it was expressed by only one of the parents. Professional attitude category was composed by codes of liking the profession, performing the profession with love, having a sense of duty, being an idealist and having an understanding that spreads teaching throughout his/her life. Professional attitude was stated by 3 (27%) administrators, 1 (6%) teacher, 1 (5%) prospective teacher and 2 (10%) parents. While professional attitude was emphasized most by administrators, it was expressed least by teachers and prospective teachers. The category of cooperation with parent was composed by codes of giving feedback to the student's parents, informing the parents about the incorrect behaviors they observe in the child, having strong communication with the parents and informing the parents about the needs of children. Cooperation with parent was emphasized by 1 (9%) administrator and 3 (14%) parents.

Approach/attitude towards child theme was presented as the same category and it was composed by codes of stooping down to the level of children, being happy with being with children, being democratic, being fair, thinking like a child, looking at the world through the eyes of a child, taking care of children, giving love, loving children, not being prejudiced against children, valuing children and seeing children as the future. Approach/attitude towards child theme was expressed by 3 (27%) administrators, 4 (24%) teachers, 7 (33%) prospective teachers, and 6 (29%) parents. Approach/attitude towards child was expressed similarly by the participants.

Quotations of the participants regarding the characteristics of a good preschool teacher are given below:

*“Someone who can stoop down to the children's level, who can spend good and fun time with them, whose communication with the parents is strong, and who can be creative.” (A 2)*

*“Not being judgmental, being knowledgeable about child development and education, nutrition and child health, being a careful and good observer.” (T 11)*

*“(S/he) must be creative, productive, hardworking, energetic, flexible, understanding, patient, open to new things and self-improving.” (PT 17)*

*“I would wish him/her to be friendly, suave, loving and knowledgeable, reliable and with a cheerful disposition.” (F 18)*

### 3.2. Findings Regarding the Rationales for Determining the Characteristics of a Good Preschool Teacher

Table 2: Emerging categories regarding the rationales of determining the characteristics of a good preschool teacher

Theme	Category	Administrator		Teacher		Prospective Teacher		Parent	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Child-centered Rationales	Periodic Feature	2	18	2	12	8	38	7	33
	Contribution to Children	2	18	6	35	8	38	4	19
	Children's Interests / Needs	-	-	3	18	6	29	5	24
	Relationship with Children	-	-	3	18	5	24	1	5
	Total	4	36	10	59	18	86	17	81
Professional Rationales	Benefit/Productivity	4	36	5	29	3	14	3	14
	Professional Necessity	2	18	4	24	3	14	2	10
	Professional Peace	-	-	2	12	2	10	-	-
	Total	5	45	9	53	7	33	5	24
Experience	Experience	3	27	1	6	-	-	1	5

As can be seen in Table 2, the rationales for determining the characteristics of a good preschool teacher were discussed in three themes as child-centered reasons, professional reasons and experience.

Child-centered rationales theme was consisted of four categories as periodic feature, contribution to children, children's interests/needs and relationship with children. Child-centered rationales were expressed by 4 (36%) administrators, 10 (59%) teachers, 18 (86%) prospective teachers and 17 (81%) parents. While child-centered rationales were emphasized mostly by the prospective teacher and the parents, they were stated by the administrators the least. Periodic feature category was composed by codes of the ages of the children being young, the preschool period being important, the children being active in the said period, the fact that the teacher is one of the people who has a significant impact on children's lives, the change in children taking place very rapidly, the foundation of the child being laid in the preschool period, the first steps of children into school and education life and the ability to shape children in the desired manner. Periodic feature was expressed by 2 (18%) administrators, 2 (12%) teachers, 8 (38%) prospective teachers and 7 (33%) parents. Periodic feature was emphasized mostly by the prospective teachers while it least expressed by the

teachers. The category of contribution to children was composed by the codes of contributing to children, giving new excitement to children, educating children, influencing the development of children, teaching children, supporting children, helping children, guiding children correctly, providing children many things, improving children's critical and creative thinking skills, helping children love school and their teachers and preparing children for the future. Contribution to children was expressed by 2 (18%) administrators, 6 (35%) teachers, 8 (38%) prospective teachers and 4 (19%) parents. While contribution to children was most emphasized by teachers and prospective teachers, it was expressed least by administrators and parents. Children's interests/needs category was composed by the codes of taking the interests of children into account in activities, the need for a teacher who loves himself/herself, the need for a teacher who smiles and who is good humored, the need for a teacher who can act in accordance with the interests and needs of children, to know the characteristics of children very well, to be a teacher suitable for a developing and changing generation, to understand children well, children's need to reach accurate information, children being different from each other, understanding of children's behavior and child psychology. Children's interests/needs were expressed by 3 (18%) teachers, 6 (29%) prospective teachers, and 5 (24%) parents. While children's interests/needs were most emphasized by prospective teachers but not expressed by administrators. Relationship with children category was composed by the codes of being able to communicate with children in a well and healthy manner, communicating effectively with the child, not experiencing a negative processes, being able to change the classroom atmosphere in a positive way, solving problems immediately with appropriate solutions and maintaining balance by being with children. Relationship with children was expressed by 3 (18%) teachers, 5 (24%) prospective teachers and 1 (5%) parent. While the relationship with children was most emphasized by prospective teachers, it was not expressed by administrators.

Professional rationales theme was consisted of three themes as benefit/productivity, professional necessity and professional peace. Professional rationales were expressed by 5 (45%) administrators, 9 (53%) teachers, 7 (33%) prospective teachers, and 5 (24%) parents. Professional rationales were expressed mostly by teachers and least by parents. Benefit/productivity category was composed by the codes of to be successful, to be a good teacher, to be efficient, to do her/his job well, to shine a light and to be beneficial to others. Benefit/productivity was expressed by 4 (36%) administrators, 5 (29%) teachers, 3 (14%) prospective teachers, and 3 (14%) parents. Benefit/productivity was most emphasized by administrators, while it was least expressed by prospective teachers and parents. Professional necessity category was composed by the codes of being able to do the job, because the teacher must have these features, because it requires mastery, because it is a difficult job, because it is a job that requires skill, because it is a job with a lot of responsibility, and because it is a job that requires patience. Professional necessity was expressed by 2 (18%) administrators, 4 (24%) teachers, 3 (14%) prospective teachers, and 2 (10%) parents. Professional necessity was mostly emphasized by teachers, while it was expressed least by parents. Professional peace category was composed by the codes of to do his/her job with love, to be happy in his/her professional life and not to complain about his/her situation. Professional peace was stated by 2 (12%) teachers and 2 (10%) prospective teachers.

The experience theme was expressed as the same category and it was composed by the codes of experience, seeing how boring it is to do the same things over and over, problems encountered in the education and training process and because we see it that way. Experience was expressed by 3 (27%) administrators, 1 (6%) teacher and 1 (5%) parent. While experience is most emphasized by administrators, it is not expressed by prospective teachers.

Quotations of the participants regarding the rationales of determining the characteristics of

a good preschool teacher are given below:

*“I think that a preschool teacher will only be beneficial to the children with these qualifications at the highest level.” (A 11)*

*“Being professionally equipped is important for the education of children. Communication is important in terms of establishing a good and healthy communication with children. Since the age group is so small, it is important to act patiently and with compassion.” (T 25)*

*“Because preschool teaching is a profession that requires patience. In addition, the person who will do this job should treat children in a loving and tolerant way. Individuals who do not have these characteristics will see this profession as a necessity instead of doing this job fondly in the future periods of their profession.” (PT 13)*

*“Because these are features that a preschool teacher should have and because s/he teaches children at a young age. The foundation of the child is laid in preschool education.” (F 30)*

### 3.3. Findings Regarding Suggestions For Being A Good Preschool Teacher

Table 3: Emerging Categories regarding suggestions for being a good preschool teacher

Category	Administrato r		Teacher		Prospective Teacher		Parent	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Professional Development	7	64	16	94	16	76	6	29
Child-Centered Characteristics	4	36	3	18	8	38	14	67
Personal Characteristics	2	18	4	24	3	14	4	19
Pre-Service Education	5	45	2	12	4	19	2	10
Professional Attitude	1	9	2	12	2	10	2	10
Cooperation with the Parent	1	9	-	-	-	-	3	14

As can be seen in Table 3, it was suggested by the participants that professional development should be provided, child-centered characteristics should be present, personal characteristics should be taken into account, pre-service education should be effective, the importance of professional attitudes should be realized and it is necessary to establish a cooperation with parent in order to be a good preschool teacher. Professional development category was composed by codes of by participating in trainings/seminars/courses, improving one's self in his/her field, researching, being open to/following innovations in the field, reading publications (articles-books) related to the field, making projects, participating in group meetings and producing new things. Professional development was expressed by 7 (64%) administrators, 16 (94%) teachers, 16 (76%) prospective teachers and 6 (29%) parents. While professional development was emphasized by almost all teachers, it was expressed at least by parents. The category of child-centered characteristics was composed by codes of by loving children, by respecting children, by recognizing children's personal characteristics, by planning and executing activities suitable for the child, by observing children, by understanding children, by giving importance to children's opinions, by giving children certain responsibilities, by stooping down to the level of the child, by being interested in children, by sparing time for children, by seeing things through the eyes of children, by

giving confidence to children, by involving children in the process, by practicing fun activities, by being together with children, by having a good knowledge of the developmental characteristics of children, by using a language that appeals to the child, by making children love school, by communicating with the child correctly/beautifully/effectively, and by being knowledgeable about everything about the child. Child-centered characteristics were expressed by 4 (36%) administrators, 3 (18%) teachers, 8 (38%) prospective teachers, and 14 (67%) parents. Child-centered characteristics were expressed mostly by parents and least by teachers. Personal characteristics category was composed by codes of by being active, by being calm, by being loving, by being creative, by being patient, by taking up new hobbies, by problem solving, by questioning, by being childlike, by being understanding, by being empathetic, by being calm and gentle. Personal characteristics were expressed by 2 (18%) administrators, 4 (24%) teachers, 3 (14%) prospective teachers, and 4 (19%) parents. Personality traits were most expressed by teachers and least by prospective teachers. Pre-service education category was composed by codes of by receiving a good and quality education, by giving more place to practice/internship in undergraduate education, by equipping academic knowledge sufficiently, by ensuring that experienced teachers can teach at the academy, by enabling prospective teachers to see as many teacher classes and class types (kindergarten, nursery class, village school) as possible, by ensuring that prospective teachers are kept away from the factors that lead to anxiety during the undergraduate education process and by increasing the drama, music and game trainings in the undergraduate education. Pre-service education was expressed by 5 (45%) administrators, 2 (12%) teachers, 4 (19%) prospective teachers, and 2 (10%) parents. Pre-service education was expressed mostly by administrators and least by parents. Professional attitude category was composed by codes of by loving the profession, by respecting the profession and by taking the profession seriously. Professional attitude was expressed by 1 (9%) administrator, 2 (12%) teachers, 2 (10%) prospective teachers, and 2 (10%) parents. Cooperation with parent category was composed by codes of by recognizing parent environments and the behavioral characteristics of parents, communicating effectively with parents and guiding parents correctly. Cooperation with parent was expressed by one administrator and three parents.

Quotations of the participants regarding suggestions for being a good preschool teacher are given below:

*“S/he can improve himself/herself by in-service trainings and projects. S/he can read a lot of books.” (A 5)*

*“It is always possible to attend courses opened in one's own field. Books related to our field can be read. The most important thing is to respect your profession. If you don't like your job, you can't be successful no matter what job it is.” (T 6)*

*“Articles related to the field should be read. While studying teaching, it should be ensured that more time is spent with the children in the kindergarten so that there is no difficulty when starting the profession. It can be ensured that teachers participate in seminars on a continuous basis. Good educational books should be read.” (PT 14)*

*“By being understanding, by learning to empathize, by saying 'I should learn' instead of saying 'I know', and by approaching with love, which comes first.” (F 36)*

#### **4. Results, Discussions and Suggestions**

The personal characteristics of a good preschool teacher were considered more important than other characteristics by all participants. The extroversion/assertiveness personal

characteristics of teachers were emphasized more by the participating groups. While the professional characteristics of the teacher were emphasized more by the administrators and teachers, the approach to the child was expressed in similar proportion by the participant groups. In terms of determining the characteristics of a good preschool teacher; the participants presented rationales by considering their children, the profession and the professional experience. Prospective teachers and parents emphasized child-centered rationales more, while administrators and teachers emphasized professional rationales more. In addition, the participants offered suggestions on professional development, pre-service education, personality characteristics, approach/attitude towards children, professional attitude and cooperation with parent in relation to being a good preschool teacher.

The present study was conducted with the aim of determining the perceptions of school administrators, preschool teachers, prospective preschool teachers and parents regarding the characteristics of a good preschool teacher. The participants have emphasized teachers' personal characteristics, professional characteristics and their approach towards the child as the characteristics of a good preschool teacher. When expressing the characteristics of a good preschool teacher; the participants have presented rationales in terms of the child dimension, professional dimension and experience dimension. Participants suggested that in order to be a good preschool teacher, professional development should be provided, child-centered characteristics should be present, personal characteristics should be taken into account, pre-service education should be effective, the importance of professional attitudes should be realized and it is necessary to establish a cooperation with parent.

Personal characteristics were emphasized by nearly all of the participants in regard to the characteristics of good preschool teacher. Participants also have emphasized personal characteristics in their suggestions of being a good preschool teacher. This is an indication that the personal characteristics of preschool teachers are an important factor in preschool education and are considered as more important than other characteristics. Tekişik (2003) states that the foundation of the teaching profession is formed by the personal characteristics, which affect all aspects of a person's life (Taşkaya, 2012). In most countries, personal characteristics of the teacher takes an important place among the characteristics that are sought in a good preschool teacher (Miller, 2008). Many researchers (Berntsson, 1999; Lillvist et al., 2014; Marton, 1980; cited in Sheridan et al., 2011; Nasiopoulou, Williams, Sheridan & Hansen, 2017; Sheridan et al., 2011; Tanhan & Delen 2019; Veisson & Kabaday, 2018) have emphasized that the personal characteristics is a very important component concerning the characteristics of a good preschool teacher. For instance, it was expressed in the studies conducted with preschool teachers that personal characteristics such as effective communication skills, compassion (Sheridan et.al, 2011), creativity, helpfulness, empathy and openness to new experiences (Veisson & Kabaday, 2018) should be present. The study by Tanhan and Delen (2019), kindergarten principals emphasized the personal characteristics of the ideal preschool teacher the most. Parents generally stated that a good preschool teacher should have characteristics such as being patient, gentle and understanding (Howes, Whitebook & Phillips, 1992). Prospective teachers also expressed those personal characteristics such as being attentive, flexible and sociable should be present in a good preschool teacher (Lillvist et al., 2014). It is especially important for the preschool teacher to be friendly, affectionate, cheerful, warm-blooded, empathetic, sincere and suave in terms of establishing positive and productive relationships. It is a known fact that the personality development is shaped to a great extent in preschool period. Also, children in preschool period take their teachers as role models. Therefore, the personality characteristics of the preschool teacher hold great significance.

Participants have emphasized professional characteristics when expressing the

characteristics of a good preschool teacher. Participating groups also expressed professional characteristics in their suggestions for being a good preschool teacher. Although professional characteristics were expressed by all participating groups, administrators and teachers emphasized it more than prospective teachers and parents. The fact that administrators and teachers emphasize professional characteristics more may be due to the fact that they are within the profession and therefore they focus on professional qualifications. Prospective teachers and parents expressed rationales for professional characteristics less because they were relatively far from the profession. It is possible for preschool teachers to improve their professional knowledge through in-service training, both during their undergraduate education and while performing their profession. Nonetheless, being able to use the acquired information effectively is as important as having professional knowledge. Preschool teachers can direct the education process with the knowledge, skills and competencies they possess (Dağlıoğlu, 2009). According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Standards (2001), effective preschool teachers must have content knowledge and professional skills in all aspects of children's learning, involve parents in children's education process, and establish relationships that support parents. According to the National Research Council (NRC) report, a good preschool teacher should know how children learn as well as what they need to learn and how to establish effective relationships with parents (Barnett, 2003). In addition, the fact that professional characteristics are an important component among the characteristics of a good preschool teacher is emphasized by many researchers (Barnett, 2003; Berntsson, 1999; Dağlıoğlu, 2009; Dalli, 2008; Howes et al. 2003; Lillvist et al., 2014; Marton, 1980; cited in Sheridan et al., 2011; Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson 2011; Sommer et al., 2010; Syslová, 2019). For example, Berntsson (1999) states that theoretical and practical knowledge, along with personal characteristics, is an important component in the competence of a good preschool teacher. According to Dalli (2008); a professional teacher must have professional knowledge and also apply it. Professional characteristics of teachers were also emphasized in studies conducted with preschool teachers on the characteristics of a good preschool teacher (Sheridan et al., 2011; Veisson & Kabaday, 2018). In the study of Tanhan and Delen (2019), kindergarten principals emphasized that the ideal preschool teacher should have professional competence. In the study of Lillvist et al. (2014), prospective teachers stated that a good preschool teacher should have pedagogical and content competence.

Preschool teachers' approaches/attitudes towards children is another dimension indicating the teacher's efficiency. In relation to the characteristics of a good preschool teacher, the approach towards the child was expressed less than and at similar rates with the personal and professional characteristics of the teachers by the participant groups. In addition to that, the participants also mentioned the characteristics of teachers' approach/attitude towards children in their suggestions about how a good preschool teacher should be. Among the participating groups, the approach to the child emerged mostly in the suggestions of parents. It can be said that children are a priority for parents and teacher characteristics are evaluated as child-centered. While personal and professional characteristics are desired characteristics for all teachers, the approach towards children become more prominent in preschool teachers. From this point of view, it can be said that the perception of good teacher varies according to the education level that is being given. It can be said that the reason for this is that young children receive education in the preschool period and that young children have more needs such as attention, love and affection. Effective preschool teachers offer their attention and support by interacting with children in a sensitive and responsive way. (Barnett, 2003; Howes et al. 2003). Supportive interaction, communication and interest sharing are considered important among the criteria of high quality preschool teachers. (Howes et al. 2003; Sheridan et al. 2009). Also, according to the National Research Council (NRC) report, a good



preschool teacher should know how to establish effective relationships with children (Barnett, 2003). In the studies on the characteristics of a good preschool teacher, the teacher's approach towards children was emphasized. For example, according to the study of Bassok et al. (2017), nearly half of the parents stated that teacher-child interactions are among their favorite teacher characteristics. In the studies with preschool teachers it is stated that a professional preschool teacher takes the interests of children into account, applies democratic leadership (Sheridan et.al., 2011), communicates and interacts effectively with children, loves children, understands children, and is aware of children's need for intimacy (Veisson & Kabaday, 2018). In the study of Tanhan and Delen (2019), kindergarten principals stated that the ideal teacher should sympathize with the child. According to the study of Lillvist et al. (2014), prospective teachers stated that teachers should have competencies related to the child's perspective.

While expressing the characteristics of a good preschool teacher, the participants presented rationales about the child dimension, professional dimension and experience dimension. While the child dimension was expressed most by prospective teachers and parents, it was emphasized least by administrators. The reason for this can be the fact that the prospective teachers lack of professional experience. Moreover, In addition, prospective teachers' learning processes continue and they acquire child-centered information in this process. Children are at the center of the education process for parents as well. Therefore, parents consider their children as a priority and consider teacher characteristics within this framework. It is an important point to determine the characteristics by placing the children in center while expressing the characteristics of a good preschool teacher. Preschool education encompasses a more sensitive period than other education levels because the work is performed with young children whose individual differences come to the fore. It is also known that the education given in the preschool period is of vital importance. Since children are in the young age group, their interests and needs may differ. For this reason, there is a need for teachers who have a positive relationship with children, respond to children's interests and needs, and contribute to children. Professional dimension was expressed mostly by teachers and least by parents. The fact that preschool teachers pay more attention to the professional dimension may be due to the fact that they are a group within the profession itself. Because preschool teachers can better know the requirements of the profession and the necessary conditions to be useful in the profession. Preschool teachers work with younger age groups. It is normal to have different characteristics such as patience, skill and responsibility in working with children compared to other branch teachers. While the experience dimension is most emphasized by administrators, it is not expressed by prospective teachers. The administrators benefited from their own experiences while expressing the characteristics of a good preschool teacher, and they determined the characteristics that a good preschool teacher should have within this framework. The administrators had the opportunity to work with many preschool teachers with different characteristics. Therefore, this experience has guided the administrators in determining the characteristics of a good teacher.

Participants emphasized professional development in their suggestions for being a good preschool teacher. From the participating groups; while almost all of the teachers stated that professional development is necessary, parents were the group that expressed less opinion on this issue. This may result from the fact that preschool teachers are the group that performs the profession themselves and they are aware of the necessity of professional development. Parents, on the other hand, constitute the group that is furthest from the field and they have less knowledge of the requirements of the profession. Today, teachers also need to follow the rapid change that is occurring in the scientific field and educate themselves on the

developments. In order to do so, a good teacher needs to know how and where to find the information s/he needs and make an effort to access this information. Continuous professional development is recognized as an important dimension in the quality of preschool teachers in most countries (Miller, 2008). According to the OECD, preschool teachers are the most important persons responsible for the quality of children's learning and well-being. Consequently, it is an important issue for every society that preschool teachers ensure their professional development (OECD, 2017). The study of Nasiopoulou et al. (2017) revealed that a good preschool teacher needs continuous professional development. This is also important for the quality of preschool education. According to the study of Sheridan et al. (2011) a good preschool teacher should have the desire to educate and change himself/herself. Veisson & Kabaday's study (2018) stated that professional preschool teachers should take initiatives to ensure their professional development.

The importance of undergraduate education for being a good preschool teacher was expressed by the groups. Managers has been the group that emphasized the importance of pre-vocational education most. It is important to train and educate preschool teachers in line with the requirements of the profession. In this regard, faculties of education have a great responsibility. In the study by Veisson and Kabaday (2018), Estonian preschool teachers mentioned the importance of teacher education for professional preschool teachers.

This study is a qualitative study conducted with 11 school administrators, 17 preschool teachers, 21 preschool teacher candidates and 21 parents. Therefore, the results of the study cannot be generalized. The results of the research are limited to the opinions of the participants. Similar studies can be conducted with more sample groups. Different measurement tools and mixed designs can be used in these studies. Scale development studies can be performed in relation with the good teacher characteristics. Scientific studies with the aim of training good teachers can be supported by cooperation of the Ministry of National Education with the Board of Higher Education. It is considered beneficial to take study results into account both in the teacher training system and in the in-service training of teachers. Personal characteristics were found to be prominent in the characteristics of a good preschool teacher. By using different selection methods personal characteristics dimension can be taken into account in the selection of prospective preschool teachers and teachers. A system can be created in order to nourish teachers' professional development. In order for prospective teachers to have teaching experience, practice courses can be given importance during their undergraduate education.

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