

## Preschool Teachers Views and Practices on English Language Teaching

Tuba Yilmaz<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Foreign language education during the preschool years significantly contributes to the mental, cognitive, and social development of children. Empirical research indicates that language acquisition at this stage enhances children's understanding of their mother tongue, fosters abstract thinking abilities, and promotes cultural awareness. Given that young children possess a heightened receptiveness to language learning, instruction during this period allows for the natural absorption of a foreign language. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such education heavily depends on the competency of educators and the suitability of the methods employed. The critical period hypothesis underscores that childhood represents an optimal phase for language acquisition due to the brain's high level of neural plasticity. During this developmental window, children are particularly adept at internalizing the phonological and syntactic aspects of a foreign language. Furthermore, employing naturalistic teaching methods—such as games, songs, and storytelling—has been shown to enhance the effectiveness of language learning at this age. Despite these benefits, concerns have been raised regarding the potential adverse effects of introducing a foreign language before children have fully established proficiency in their mother tongue. Therefore, foreign language education during the preschool years should be designed to complement and reinforce mother tongue development. In Turkey, foreign language instruction in preschool settings is predominantly offered by private institutions and remains limited within public schools. To address this disparity, it is vital to develop curricular frameworks aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and to invest in professional development opportunities for educators through in-service training programs. Preschool teachers, in particular, need to cultivate expertise in foreign language pedagogy, as their proficiency plays a pivotal role in the success of educational outcomes. In conclusion, incorporating

1 Öğr. Gör., Erzincan Binali Yıldırım Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu, tyilmaz@erzincan.edu.tr, ORCID: 0009-0007-6311-4338

foreign language education at the preschool level is a valuable initiative that supports children's cognitive and social growth. However, ensuring the effectiveness of such programs necessitates qualified educators, the application of appropriate teaching methodologies, and the alignment of curricula with children's developmental needs. There is an urgent need for further research and policy formulation to expand access to high-quality preschool foreign language education in Turkey and to enhance its overall efficacy.

## 1. Foreign Language Education in Preschool Period

There have been lots of studies to explain the phenomenon of learning or acquiring a foreign language in children and they are mostly based on a comparison of native language learning processes and theoretical approaches to foreign language learning. The child does not understand the meanings from the context in the acquisition of his / her native language. The child learns the words of the language based on the situations he / she experiences and the information he / she has acquired before. Communication between the family and the child begins before the child acquires the language. A functional communication system (which takes place from communication to word) is an important prerequisite for language acquisition. However, the meaning of language is reached in institutional education environment. These results are given below:

- Under the same conditions, children learn morphological, syntactic structures and words later than adolescents and adults. However, children can reach the highest level of learning.
- Some studies confirm that there is a critical period in learning morphology and syntax.
- Those who meet in foreign language and childhood and adolescence can be more effective in expression, emphasis and intonation skills.
- When the highest level of access is reached, early learning in foreign language learning can give better results.
- This result supports the critical period cycle in verbal production

How children learn a foreign language is dependent on many factors. Although it cannot be fully clarified, it is agreed that children have various preparatory characteristics in language learning. Especially age-related foreign language learning studies have been effective in determining the neural, cognitive, psychological and social characteristics of young children.

**1.1. Neural Characteristic:** The child's brain has neural flexibility until it reaches neural-physiological maturity. Neural flexibility in the speech

area of the brain enables children to acquire the full qualification of the phonological features of foreign language.

The task separation between the hemispheres is completed by about 10 years of age, during which the right hemisphere can undertake the functions of the left hemisphere. This is considered as the mutual support of a holistic activity that facilitates the learning of languages. Neural changes involving the first 10 years of life occur in the critical period. In this period, the human brain is ready to learn one or more languages (Edmondson, 1999; Ellis, 1994; Lighbown and Spada, 1999). After the critical period, languages are learned formally and with unnatural language speaking.

**1.2. Social-Psychological Feature:** After the critical period, young children benefit from appropriate socio-psychological conditions for language acquisition (Taylor, 2000 pp.321-333):

- Children need strong communication.
- The language they acquire is the basic communication tool of children.
- Children spend most of their time talking.
- Children easily determine their own speech pattern.
- Children have imitation skills.
- Children are not prevented from attempting to use incorrect words.
- Family members ignore the cute language mistakes of children and also enjoy them.
- The speeches are made in a concrete manner and in relation to the context.
- Knowledge of the language (s) and the world is among the basic activities of children (p.82)

According to Taylor (1999), the language(s) can be acquired in a non-formal manner and with natural competence, regardless of the language or languages.

**1.3. Cognitive Feature:** Learning in children takes place directly and automatically. Due to their cognitive characteristics, children are not aware of their learning. They have not yet acquired metacognitive abilities. They do not have conscious control of their abilities. In this context, children are open to another language. In other words, the social identity, which is not fully formed, is free from social factors and pressures; foreign voices and structures make it more open. However, in adolescence and adulthood, the

mental and spiritual disability which prevents the entry of language input into perceptual input, creates a negative direction in language learning. Early foreign language learning;

- Affects mental development positively.
- Contributes to the development of memory of the child.
- Gives the flexibility to think, language sensitivity and listening.
- Makes the child understand the native language.
- Allows the child to communicate with others.
- Opens the doors of other cultures.

Contributes to future education and work life (Center for Applied Linguistics [CAL], <http://www.cal.org/earlylang/benbi.htm>).

## **2. Importance of Foreign Language Acquisition in Preschool Period**

Foreign language learning at an early age improves understanding of the native language of the child and allows the child to communicate more easily with his / her environment. At the same time, foreign language teaching improves the child's thinking and flexibility, listening ability and sensitivity. It gives the child a broad linguistic prediction for the future education and training process. It also extends the angle of view because the human brain is like an empty plate at birth. Over time, the environment is seen with what is seen and heard. It is not the qualities and abilities that the child will be born and what nature he will be, but the environment and experiences in which he / she lives (Diken, 2012).

The child who learns a foreign language at an early age is more mature than his / her peers in psychological terms and in terms of academic success. In addition, foreign language learning makes a great contribution to children's mental development and socialization in society. Even though the children do not actively use the second language in daily life, even if they forget what they have learned, their curiosity towards the foreign language awakens and they realize that there is a different language and culture. As in bilingualism, it should be remembered that the native language should be taught very well while teaching the second language at an early age (Yıldız, 2015).

Krashen (1973) suggests that language development in children's brains begins around the age of two and continues until adolescence. If a child starts learning a foreign language during this phase, they can acquire it as effectively as their native language. According to Lambert (1972), if a

child who has already started acquiring their native language begins foreign language education without surpassing the critical age period, they become more resilient in their academic journey compared to their peers. This early introduction to a foreign language plays a significant role in enhancing children's cognitive development. Beydoğan (1998) asserts that a child's perception and engagement with the external world are intricately tied to the advancement of their cognitive processes. The progression of these cognitive processes fundamentally relies on interaction, with language serving as the primary medium enabling such interaction. Anşın (2006) highlights that early exposure to foreign language instruction enhances children's cognitive agility and improves their capacity for comprehension in their native language. Similarly, Sevinç (2003) argues that foreign language education for preschool-aged children can be effectively introduced after the age of five, once they have developed a foundational proficiency in their native language. The goal of this introduction is not to create significant linguistic distinctions but to help children acknowledge the existence of other languages and cultures beyond their own. To facilitate effective language learning, children should be exposed to a foreign language in a naturalistic setting. Language education during this stage should employ organic methods such as games, songs, and rhymes, complemented by technological tools. These approaches are particularly beneficial for fostering fundamental language development skills such as listening, imitation, and conceptual understanding, as emphasized by Dönmez et al. (1997).

According to Kara, Sharon, Lapkin, and Merrill Swam's (2004) research; it has been found out that second language education at preschool period does not disadvantageously impress the native language. It has been found that the children who have been educated in this way have come to an awfully great level in terms of both diegetic and perception in the second language (p.306). However, according to Kotil (2002), foreign language teaching at an early age may have negative effects on both native language and second language use of children because children at this age do not fully dominate the native language. When the child reaches a certain maturity in his / her native language, however, they can achieve success in learning foreign languages.

The linguists mentioned above believe that the problem-solving skills of children who learn foreign languages are remarkably strong. Teaching foreign languages at an early age enhances a child's intelligence and improves their understanding of their native language. In a likely manner, the sooner you begin learning an outside dialect, the simpler it is to internalize the dialect. Actually, the point of foreign language teaching in preprimary education

isn't to procure foreign language as the child learns his/her local language, but to donate mindfulness of the presence of language and societies (Mirici, 2001).

Erdoğan (2018) stated that language teaching had a positive effect on children's problem solving skills and those children who were learning a language performed more successfully than standardized students in mathematics, native language and social studies. He also suggests that children who learn foreign languages in pre-primary education have a very strong problem-solving ability. The beginning of the language-based interaction affects the development of the concept and gives it new dimensions.

Language is indistinguishably entwined with all mental process. Thinking, remembering, grasping, directing, and perceiving information are all mental exercises related to speaking and learning a language. Intelligence and language improve in a collinear direction and support each other. Therefore, the child's language development contributes to his / her mental development. According to Bloom (1989), based on the results of many studies, it is concluded that one of the most decisive predictors of the success of the child in the reading class of the first grade is the vocabulary that he developed before this class (preschool). Beginning of the interaction based on language affects the development of the concept and gives it new dimensions. With the introduction of the language, both the conceptual development that started earlier and the developing concepts are becoming more likely to be concepts that have social validity. During the learning of a new language, older children can grasp translation, word acquisition and grammar faster. However, it should not be forgotten that young children have the ability to develop an innate accent. In addition, it is known that foreign language learning at an early age increases the ability to think abstract in children more than the children who study in a single language. The development of this skill gives the child a high level of cognitive abilities such as concept advancement and assessment.

According to Aktaş and İşığüznel (2013), in normal life conditions, every person acquires his / her native language as a language. This process, which is described as acquisition, develops as a natural process. However, those who try to learn a second or third language after the native language are now in the learning process and their work is not as easy as obtaining a native language, and it is unfortunately not successful when every person enters this process. The foreign language learned at an early age increases the limits of the child's perception of events and allows them to recognize different cultures. Recognizing different cultures, the child establishes relationships

between the foreign culture he / she knows and his / her own culture and makes comparisons and makes an effort to know his / her culture better.

Fröhlich-Ward (1997) suggests that the optimal age for children to begin learning a foreign language is when they are able to grasp the social rules necessary for learning within a community, which is typically around five years old in Europe. It is important to note that group-based learning plays a crucial role in helping children acquire a foreign language. The Ministry of National Education, along with applicable legislation, should ensure that children receive the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors fundamental to preschool education. Among these are:

- Explaining the subjects that will enable children to develop mentally, with examples from their daily lives, as children will understand.
- Helping the physical, mental and emotional development of children to make good habits.
- Directing students to various competition activities such as playing game , storytelling, discussion environment and singing
- Helping their hand skills through activities such as holding pens, teaching toys drawing, drawing and making models.
- Trying to understand and develop children's interests and orientations to give children imaginative, creative and critical thinking and communication skills.
- Helping children to trust themselves and move on their own.
- Organizing activities to improve children's physical development through common social behavior.
- Supporting language development through fairy tale, story, riddle, song and poetry.

### **3. Preschool Foreign Language Education in Turkey**

The evolving dynamics of international political, economic, and cultural interactions, driven by shifting global conditions, have rendered cross-border communication an essential necessity. In the foreseeable future, the extent of modernity is likely to be evaluated based on the ability to attain universality. This universality can be pursued through two pivotal avenues: the accumulation of cultural and scientific knowledge, and the facilitation of effective communication, which inherently underscores the significance of foreign language proficiency (Aktaş & İşigüzel, 2014).

Turkey is one of the first countries participating in the Council of Europe in 1950 and participated in all the work uninterrupted. One of the aims of the Council of Europe is to develop mutual understanding among European citizens of different cultures and to give all individuals the European identity. The Council, whose official language is English and French, declared the year 2001 as the Year of European Languages in order to achieve this goal and underlined the importance of using at least two or three of the various languages spoken in Europe for economic, social and cultural life. (Akalin & Rich, 2007). Hulstijn (2006) states that the official standard adopted by the European Union for every European citizen is sufficient knowledge of at least two languages. He underlines the need to establish national and international data networks, criticizing the fact that researches for the development of language acquisition remain mostly within national boundaries.

The importance of learning and teaching English in an integrated and changing world has been accepted by many of us as an indisputable fact. It is a good idea to learn a foreign language and to acquire a lot of information in a much shorter time, but the problem we face here is how the educators should understand how to teach the foreign language and how these people should determine well before and during education. (Gokdemir, 2005). Children's brain development for language begins around the age of two and progresses through adolescence. If a child is introduced to a foreign language during this period, they can acquire it with the same proficiency as their native language (Krashen, 1973). However, Vos (1997) suggests that for many years, the notion of teaching foreign languages to preschool children has been considered a misconception.

Recent studies indicate that the optimal period for a child to learn a foreign language is within the first three to four years of life. Anşın (2006) suggests that introducing foreign language instruction at an early age not only enhances a child's intelligence but also strengthens their ability to understand their native language. Moreover, a child who begins foreign language education during this critical early stage of mother tongue acquisition tends to outperform their peers academically in later years. This early exposure to learning a foreign language also plays a pivotal role in fostering cognitive development in children.

Linguists suggest that children who are exposed to foreign languages in preschool exhibit strong problem-solving skills (İlter & Sühendan, 2007). Similarly, Kara (1999) argues that introducing a child to a foreign language at an early age, especially through a cultural lens, can contribute to their



development as more tolerant, globally minded individuals with enhanced communication abilities. By comparing their own cultural values with those of other cultures, such children may grow into more resilient and well-rounded individuals. In essence, early foreign language education positively impacts a child's social, personal, and cultural growth.

In line with the belief in the importance of foreign language education, foreign language courses take place in many developed or developing countries' educational programs. In Turkish education system, children can learn one or two foreign languages. According to the decision no. 32 of the Board of Education on 30.03.2000 published in the Communiqué No. 2511 in April 2000 of the Ministry of National Education, programs supported by foreign language courses were implemented in preschool institutions carrying the desired characteristics together with the native language education program. This may create a need that preschool teachers should provide English education.

As stated in the 2004 action plan of the European Union, foreign language education in the member countries starts with primary school or kindergarten. However, training students in the 2012-2013 academic years so far in Turkey could meet only in the 4th grade foreign language (Bayyurt, 2012).

With the help of the 4+4+4 education system which was put into effect as of the 2012-2013 Academic Year, the starting age for primary school was reduced to 5 (on a voluntary basis); English education began to be given from the second grade. Therefore, a child who started school at the age of 5 began to meet in English at the age of 6. Within the framework of this reform, English education was re-planned to be taught from the second year with the new curriculum introduced in 2013. In the teaching process, a communicative and action oriented approach was adopted within the framework of the principles of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Bayyurt, 2012). Since 2018, the previous curriculum has been partially updated by taking the opinions and contributions of a wide population such as English teachers, universities and non-governmental organizations, and a framework has been drawn up to include the dimension of values education in line with the same philosophy and principles. In our country, English instruction begins in the second year of public schools, while in nearly all private schools, it starts from the first grade. Additionally, many pre-school education institutions gradually introduce English to their students (Yaman, 2018).

In order to make the education system successful, teachers need to have certain qualifications in terms of cognitive, affective and dynamic points because the attitudes of teachers, their sensory reactions to events, their habits and their communication with their students have an important role in shaping education. Teachers' perception of competence that they can accomplish a task successfully will help them to perform their profession in a motivated way. Teachers who have positive perception of competence will affect their students positively. According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy perception provides belief that individuals can do the work necessary to perform the goals and perform within a certain framework. Self-efficacy is a belief system. It is seen that people with high level of competence spend more effort and steps with great determination to achieve their goals and succeed (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2003). In the study of Aktaş and İşigüzel (2014), self-efficacy of foreign language teachers towards foreign language teaching in early age is observed while their perceptions are moderate; Saraçoğlu and Varol (2007) determined that the pre-service teachers of physical education had a positive level of foreign language. In this study, it was tried to determine the attitudes of pre-school teacher candidates towards foreign language education.

#### **4. The Importance of Pre-school Teachers' English Level**

Early childhood foreign language learning is a very important for children. A teacher is the only person who can communicate with the child in the process of foreign language teaching. Therefore, every expression used by teachers in this process takes a very important place. The influence of the preschool teacher in organizing the child's environment and learning is very important. The fact that the preschool teacher cooperates with everyone who may contribute to the foreign language directly affects the achievement of the child. The preschool teacher should be able to use the general, linguistic and cultural knowledge about foreign language effectively (Topaloğlu, 2012).

Preschool teachers play an important role in the acquisition and development of foreign language. There are some tasks that preschool teachers may help students to complete during their foreign language learning process. These tasks include; helping children develop language learning strategies, enabling children to use foreign language in a correct, comprehensible manner, improving children's listening and monitoring skills, improving children's speaking skills, improving children's reading skills, developing children's writing skills, developing children's writing skills (Aktaş and İşigüzel, 2014).

The growing recognition of the importance of teaching English to preschool children as a critical component of their overall development has highlighted the need for appropriately qualified educators in this field. However, recent research indicates a significant gap between the demand for qualified foreign language teachers for young learners and the requirement for these teachers to possess specialized skills in early childhood education. These studies emphasize the necessity of ensuring high standards in early foreign language instruction, despite persistent misconceptions suggesting that educators working with young children do not necessarily require expertise in teaching English (Dagarin Fojkar and Skubic, 2017).

In Slovenia, it is a prerequisite for pre-school educators to possess a bachelor's degree in order to teach English to children aged 1 to 5 years, as well as to those in the first year of primary education (approximately six years old). Despite this requirement, the majority of these educators lack specialized training in teaching foreign languages. The expected proficiency level in the foreign language, predominantly English, corresponds to the B2 level stipulated for the secondary school graduation examination. Presently, in-service training programs have been implemented to provide formal certification for teachers aspiring to instruct English to preschool-aged children and those up to 11 years old. These professional development programs emphasize both the enhancement of language proficiency among pre-school teachers and the pedagogical strategies pertinent to foreign language instruction. Spanning 660 instructional hours and equivalent to 60 ECTS credits, these training initiatives are aimed at equipping educators with the necessary skills and knowledge for effective English language teaching.

However, a small number of preschool teachers can complete the program because the program is very difficult. There is no official foreign language education given to preschool teachers in Slovenia. During university education, they have the right to choose elective courses with only 4 ECTS (60 interview hours) to improve their English language skills. As a result, most preschool teachers are unable to teach English effectively in the preschool period due to lack of grammar and methodological knowledge.

Research shows that almost half (47.5%) of kindergartens in Slovenia offer foreign language teaching to children and this number has increased over the past seven years. Teachers providing foreign language education in preschools are still the majority. And there are foreign language teachers who teach foreign languages once a week. However, these teachers do not have any knowledge about pre-school education programs. Accordingly, it is

necessary to train preschool teachers as experts in both foreign languages and early language teaching methodology and also in line with the kindergarten curriculum which is ideal (Dagarin Fojkar & Skubic, 2017).

Thus, the example from Slovenia given above is mostly the case in the countries where English is not the mother tongue. However, in such countries, students should start learning English at a very early age so that they can reach a level that they can speak English as good as a native speaker. Learning English at an early age would also provide them with the ability to improve their multitasking skills and academic success. Thus, all developing countries including Turkey should develop curriculums which include English lessons at pre-school period and in-service trainings should be given to pre-school teachers so that they can gain the ability to teach English to their pre-school students.

### **5. Preschool Teachers and English in Turkey**

Foreign language teaching at an early age is a very sensitive process as it is the first step of starting a foreign language for students. In this respect, the preschool teacher has an important foundation. Preschool teachers face a class full of students with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, needs, learning styles and strategies at pre-school level as in any age group. In Turkey, some of the problems that these preschool teachers face while teaching English are not having enough language teaching abilities and necessary hardware. As foreign language teaching at an early age differs from other age groups in terms of physiological, psychological, mental, cognitive, social and cultural aspects, teachers who will teach them foreign languages should be raised more specifically (Aktaş & İşıgüzel, 2014).

Adequate and effective foreign language teaching in primary and secondary education except very few foreign schools and private colleges is not seen in Turkey. With the beginning of eight years of uninterrupted education, foreign language teaching has been reduced to earlier ages. Teaching foreign language from fourth grade is also insufficient (Topaloğlu, 2012). Looking at the situation and developments in Turkey, so consistently great problems in the teaching of foreign languages seems to be taking place. First of all, it is not known by the parents and teachers that the answer to many questions such as the beginning of this training, the content of the training program given later, and the methods by which this content should be determined (Sinanoğlu, 2002).

In a study conducted by Bezcioglu in 2013, foreign language teachers working in pre-school institutions were asked to determine their views on

the aim of early foreign language learning; the students' self-reports about the planning, implementation and activities of measuring foreign language learning, the difficulties they face and the methods of coping with these difficulties. For this purpose, interviews were conducted with a total of 20 participants, 11 of whom had taken courses on foreign language teaching and nine of them did not take courses. According to the findings of the study, the primary aim of language teaching at an early age was to enable children to become aware of another language.

Besides, lack of knowledge about child development and classroom management was the biggest problem faced by participants during planning, application and measurement. In order to cope with the problems they faced in planning and practice, the participants mostly consulted their colleagues and benefited from various sources. However, they did not care much about dealing with the problems faced by children in assessing foreign language learning. In the light of these findings, it was determined that teachers should work in cooperation with all educational stakeholders to support the developmental characteristics of young children, in particular, through training and studies and to improve the quality of language learning at an early age.

With the improving technology, the significance of a second language in the world has revealed the need to determine why and how the current situation regarding second language in Turkey at the moment is. The studies on the current situation in the second language are also insufficient. In Turkey, there are the problematic natures of English lessons at public schools located in the preschool institutions. Most of the preschool teachers indicate that teachers who are studying in the Faculties of Education should be educated about the process and methods related to teaching foreign languages.

## 6. Preschool Teachers' Views on English learning

Today, learning a second language / foreign language is accepted as the requirement of the age. In our country, it is on the agenda that foreign language education is included in the preschool period. Many studies on this subject have been found in the literature review about foreign language teaching in preschool education and those studies will be mentioned below.

Küçük (2006) conducted a research about English teachers in the preschool period, English teachers, school principals, preschool teachers and families at an early age, their approach to English education, their views and expectations on this issue, the advantages and disadvantages of foreign language education at an early age study on issues such as a study it is

made. The study was carried out in Seyhan district of Adana province with a total of 274 people including families whose children were educated in 8 private schools and 8 public schools, 13 school administrators, 34 preschool teachers and their children. In the study, it was found that educators and families think that English education should be useful and necessary in the pre-school period.

İlter and Er (2007) examined the role and importance of foreign language in preschool education. Some public and private schools' parents and teachers' opinions were taken in Antalya. Teachers and parents were found to have a positive attitude towards foreign language teaching in preschool education.

In a study by Aytar-Güngör and Öğretir (2008), the views of 350 parents and 140 teachers about foreign language education given in preschool education institutions were examined according to some variables. Beginning of foreign language education at an early age indicated that more than half of the teachers would have a positive impact on the child's mind-language development. However, this study argues that teaching foreign language to children without learning their mother tongue fully will have negative effects on personality structure and social development of children.

In the study conducted by Tarım (2012), pre-service teacher candidates' opinions on multilingual education were examined and their awareness and knowledge levels were investigated. The study was carried out with 15 preschool teacher candidates. The data obtained from the interviews were examined in detail and the opinions of the prospective teachers on multilingual education were presented. Based on the results of the research, suggestions were made about reshaping teacher training programs within the framework of multilingualism and the provision of both theoretical and practical course support to prospective teachers in order to educate teachers who can meet the needs of children from linguistic minority groups.

Ateş (2015) made a research about students in the preschool period in which the views of English teachers, school administrators and preschool teachers about the necessity and justifications of foreign language education in preschool period should be taken into consideration and why they should be taught in English in the pre-school period; preschool children can learn what they are looking for. 50 preschool teachers, 50 English teachers, 50 foreign language teachers and 50 teachers in schools in six districts of Istanbul; a total of 100 managers, and 50 children who have learned English in the preschool and 50 who do not learn; a total of 100 students were employed. In this study, a large proportion of teachers, managers and

mothers mentioned that foreign language teaching is considered necessary in the preschool period and the biggest reason for the teaching of foreign language is that 'young age can learn the nature faster, easier and lasting' as described. The group, which does not require foreign language in the preschool period, declared that it is not the appropriate age for foreign language learning.

In the study of Bolat (2015), the opinions of 10 preschool, 10 Turkish and 10 foreign language teachers working in the city center of Adana were taken. Their students were in the the 4-6 age group learning foreign language. As a result of the research, it was found that teachers were positive to four-six age group children in terms of teaching foreign language and there were no differences between preschool, Turkish and foreign language teachers.

Karakuş (2016) mentioned that 20 preschool teachers working in public and private kindergartens attached to MEB and their families in Aydın city center were interviewed in order to examine the views of parents and teachers on foreign language education in preschool education institutions. According to the results of the study, the majority of parents stated that all of the teachers thought that children should receive foreign language education in preschool education institutions and that this education was sufficient. More than half of the parents stated that it was appropriate for children to start learning a foreign language at three to four years of age and that foreign language education at an early age was easier and faster, and that children could learn foreign language better at a young age. The teachers found out that foreign language education is necessary because it will be permanent when children learn at an early age and that education should be given by a foreign language teacher.

In the study conducted by Güngör and Ramazan (2017), the opinions of preschool and English teacher candidates on the teaching of English in early childhood, which has an increasing importance in recent years in many preschool institutions, especially in private institutions, were taken. The research was carried out with 80 preschool teacher candidates and 76 English teacher candidates who were in the last year of Marmara University. The results of the study showed that the candidates participating in the research from both departments are unsure about the way in which foreign language education should be followed and what methods should be used although they are aware of the importance of foreign language education at the early ages. In addition, prospective teachers stated that teacher training programs should be rearranged in order to provide foreign language education at an early age. The findings of the research have shown the necessity of putting courses

related to foreign language education at early ages to the departments of Pre-School and English Language Teaching of Universities.

## 7. Conclusion

Foreign language education during the preschool period holds significant potential for enhancing children's cognitive, social, and linguistic development. Empirical evidence supports the notion that early exposure to a foreign language positively impacts abstract thinking, memory, cultural awareness, and even proficiency in the native language. The critical period hypothesis highlights the heightened neural plasticity in young children, making this developmental phase optimal for language acquisition. Naturalistic teaching methods such as games, songs, and storytelling further enhance the effectiveness of foreign language instruction at this age.

However, the success of preschool foreign language education is contingent upon several factors, including the qualifications of teachers, the appropriateness of teaching methodologies, and the alignment of curricula with children's developmental stages. The role of preschool teachers is particularly vital, as their linguistic proficiency and pedagogical expertise directly influence educational outcomes. Despite the benefits, concerns persist regarding the potential interference with native language development if foreign language instruction begins too early or is poorly implemented.

In Turkey, foreign language education at the preschool level is predominantly offered by private institutions, with limited availability in public schools. This disparity underscores the need for comprehensive policy reforms, including the integration of foreign language education into public preschool curricula and the provision of in-service training programs for educators.

Research indicates that early foreign language education not only fosters linguistic competence but also contributes to broader educational and personal development. Nevertheless, challenges such as insufficient teacher training, lack of specialized methodologies, and limited access to resources remain significant barriers. Addressing these issues requires collaboration among policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to create a robust and inclusive system for preschool foreign language education.

In conclusion, while early foreign language education offers numerous benefits, its implementation must be carefully planned and supported by qualified educators, appropriate methodologies, and well-structured curricula. Further research and investment are essential to expand access to high-quality programs and to maximize their efficacy in Turkey and other non-native English-speaking countries.



## References

- Aktaş, T., & İşigüzel, B. (2014). Yabancı dil öğretmenlerinin erken yaşta yabancı dil öğretimine ilişkin öz yeterlik algı düzeylerinin değerlendirilmesi. *International Journal of Languages' Education and Teaching*, 3, 25-39. Retrieved from <http://www.ijlet.com/DergiTamDetay.aspx?ID=65>.
- Anşın, S. (2006). Çocuklarda yabancı dil öğretimi. *Dicle Üniversitesi Ziya Gökalp Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 6, 9-20. Retrieved from [http://zgefdergi.com/Makaleler/1680226743\\_06\\_02\\_Ansin.pdf](http://zgefdergi.com/Makaleler/1680226743_06_02_Ansin.pdf).
- Ateş, D. (2015). Okulöncesi eğitim kurumlarındaki yabancı dil uygulamaları ve bu konudaki öğretmen, yönetici ve ebeveyn görüşleri. (Msc. Thesis, İstanbul Marmara Üniversitesi).
- Aytar-Güngör, A. (2008). Toplumsal ve duygusal gelişim. *Eğitim Psikolojisi (Edit: A. Ulusoy)*.
- Bayyurt, Y. (2012). 4+4+4 eğitim sisteminde erken yaşta yabancı dil eğitimi. Yabancı Dil Eğitim Çalıştayı, Hacettepe Üniversitesi, 97-107. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258112407\\_444\\_Egitim\\_Sisteminde\\_Erken\\_Yasta\\_Yabanci\\_Dil\\_Egitimi](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258112407_444_Egitim_Sisteminde_Erken_Yasta_Yabanci_Dil_Egitimi).
- Beydoğan, H.Ö. (1998). *Çocuklarda Kavram Öğrenme ve Kavram Öğretme*, Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi Kâzım Karabekir Eğitim Fakültesi Yayınları.
- Bezcioglu, İ. G. (2013). Okulöncesi Kurumlarda Görev Yapan Yabancı Dil Öğretmenlerinin Erken Dil Öğrenimi ve Bu Konuda Karşılaştıkları Zorluklar Hakkındaki Özbildirimleri (Msc. Thesis, Middle East Technical University).
- Bolat, E. Y. (2015). 4-6 yaş grubu çocuklarda yabancı dil öğretimi hakkında öğretmen görüşleri. *International of Languages Education and Teaching*, 1(1), 706-722. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/tujped/issue/32340/369997>.
- Dagarin-Fojkar, M., & Skubic, D. (2017). Pre-service preschool teacher's belief about foreign language and early foreign language in Slovenia. *CEPS Journal*, 7 (4), 85-104.
- Dönmez, B, N. Abidoğlu, Ü. Dinçer, Ç. Erdemir, N. Gümüüşcü, Ş. (1997). *Okul Öncesi Dönemde Dil Gelişimi Etkinlikleri*. Ankara: Sim Yayıncılık.
- Edmonson, V. (1999). *Twelve Lectures on Second Language Acquisition: Foreign Language Teaching and Learning Perspective*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.
- Ellis, N. C. (1994). Implicit and explicit learning of languages.
- Erdoğan, E. (2018). Okulöncesi çocuklarda yabancı dil olarak Fransızca eğitimi. (Msc. Thesis, Samsun Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi).

- Gökbayrak, Ş. (2008). ULUSLARARASI GÖÇ VE KALKINMA TARTIŞMALARI: BEYİN GÖÇÜ ÜZERİNE BİR İNCELEME. *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi*, 63(03), 65-82.
- Güngör, B., & Ramazan, O. (2017). Okulöncesi ve İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının erken çocuklukta İngilizce öğrenimine ilişkin görüşleri. *Akademik Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 48, 479-492. Retrieved from <http://www.asosjournal.com/DergiTamDetay.aspx?ID=12336&Detay=Ozet>.
- Hanušova, S., & Najvar, P. (2006). *Foreign language acquisition at an early age*. Proceedings from the conference organised and hosted by Faculty of Education, Masaryk University. Retrieved from <http://www.ped.muni.cz/weduresearch/publikace/hn06.pdf>.
- Haznedar, B. (2003). Missing surface inflection in adult and child L2 acquisition. In *Proceedings of the 6th generative approaches to second language acquisition conference (GASLA 2002)* (pp. 140-149). Cascadilla Somerville, MA.
- Ioannou-Georgiou, S. (2015). Early language learning in Cyprus: voices from the classroom. In S. Mourao & M. Lourenco (Eds), *Early years second language education: International perspectives on theory and practice* (pp. 95–108). Abingdon: Routledge.
- İlter, B. & Er, S. (2007). Erken yaşta yabancı dil öğretimi üzerine veli ve öğretmen görüşleri. *Kastamonu Eğitim Dergisi*, 15(1), 21-30. Retrieved from [http://www.kefdergi.com/pdf/15\\_1/21.pdf](http://www.kefdergi.com/pdf/15_1/21.pdf).
- Kara, Ş. (2004). Anadil Edinimi Ve Erken Yaşta Yabancı Dil Öğretimi. *Uludağ Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 17 (2), 295-314. Retrieved from <http://www.acarindex.com/dosyalar/makale/acarindex-1423935661.pdf>.
- Karakuş, H. (2016). Okul Öncesi Dönemde Yabancı Dil Eğitimi Verilmesine İlişkin Anne- Baba ve Öğretmen Görüşlerinin İncelenmesi. *Uluslararası Erken Çocukluk Eğitimi Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 1 (2), 7-19. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/download/issue-full-file/22946>.
- Kotil, Ç. (2002). Yabancı Dil Eğitimi. *Çocuk ve Aile Dergisi*, 47, 11-13. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.gov.tr/uploads/issuefiles/ef4e/cb5c/b822/58088d51385cd.pdf>.
- Krashen, S. (1973). *Lateralization, Language Learning and Critical Period: Some new Evidence*. *A Journal of Research in Language Studies*, 23(1), 63-74. doi:10.1111/j.1467-1770.1973.tb00097.x
- Küçük, M. (2006). Okul öncesinde yabancı dil eğitimi konusunda eğitimcilerin ve ailelerin görüşleri, (Msc. Thesis. Adana Çukurova Üniversitesi).
- Lambert, W. E. (1972). *Language, Psychology and Culture*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press.
- Lenneberg, E. (1967). *Biological foundation of language*, New York: John Wiley and Sons.

- Lightbown, P. & Spada, N. (1999). *How Languages are Learned*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Merriam, S.B. (2013). *Nitel Araştırma Desen ve Uygulama İçin Bir Rehber*. (Çev. Editörü: Selahattin Turan). Ankara: Nobel Yayınları.
- Mirici, İ.H. (2001). *Çocuklara Yabancı Dil Öğretimi*. Gazi Kitabevi, Ankara.
- Nikolov, M., & Mihaljević Djigunović, J. (2011). All shades of every colour: an overview of early teaching and learning of foreign languages. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 95–119. doi:10.1017/S0267190511000183
- Oğuzkan, Ş., & Oral, G. (1997). Okul öncesi eğitimi. *İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi*, 18.
- Portikova, Z. (2015). Pre-primary second language education in Slovakia and the role of teacher training programmes. In S. Mourao & M. Lourenco (Eds.), *Early years second language education: International perspectives on theory and practice* (pp. 177–188). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Rokita-Jaśkow, J. (2013). *Foreign language learning at pre-primary level: Parental aspirations and educational practice*. Krakow: Pedagogical University Press.
- Roth, G. (1998). *Teaching Very Young Children Pre school and Early Primary*. London: Richmond Publishing.
- Sevinç, M. (2003). *Erken çocuklukta gelişim ve eğitimde yeni yaklaşımlar*. İstanbul: Morpa Kültür Yayınları.
- Sığırtmaç, A., Özbek, S. (2009). Okulöncesi dönemde ingilizce eğitimi. *İnönü Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 10 (1), 107-122, Retrieved from <https://www.pegem.net/dosyalar/dokuman/49339-20090602102013-08-okuloncesi-donemde-ingilizce-egitimi.pdf>.
- Sinanoglu, O. (2002). *Bye Bye Türkçe*. İstanbul: Otopsi Yayınevi.
- Tarım, Ş.D. (2012). Okulöncesi öğretmen adaylarının çokdilli eğitim üzerine görüşleri. *Eğitimde Kuram ve Uygulama*, 11 (2), 589-609. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/download/article-file/63467>.
- Taylor, I. (1999). *Psycholinguistics, Learning and Using Language*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall
- Topaloğlu, Y. (2012). Erken yaşta yabancı dil öğretiminde yöntem ve tekniklerin kullanılması. (Msc. Thesis, Adana Çukurova Üniversitesi).
- Yaman, İ. (2018). Türkiye’de İngilizce Öğrenmek: Zorluklar ve Fırsatlar. *RUMELİDE Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 161, 161-175. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/rumelide/issue/36662/417491>.
- Yıldız, C. (2018). Okulöncesinde yabancı dil öğretiminin önemi. *Eğitim ve Rehberlik Makaleleri*. Retrieved from <https://www.egitimtercihi.com/okulgazetesi/17365-okul-oncesi-donemde-yabancı-dil-ogretiminin-onemi.html>.

