Children's Identity Development and Pre-School Education Program in the Context of Social Identity

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the effect of social identity context on the identity development of preschool children. The study conducted qualitative interviews with 10 female teachers working in private and public institutions in Turkey. The interviews took around 50-80 minutes. Interviews with all teachers were completed in approximately 30 days. Interviews were analyzed with the MAXQDA 2020 plus program. Teachers' view; identity reflections, and identity development factors. After the analyses, the context of social identity was sought in the preschool education program to strengthen the available data. Although teachers have focused on educational institutions and their professional responsibilities, it has been revealed that the context of social identity is not included in detail in the preschool education program applied throughout the country and to which educational institutions and teachers are subject. Considering that teachers do not deal with identity types separately and express their opinions on the concept of identity in general, more clear information about identity development has not been accessed. Research on the subject has revealed that the social identity theory is valid in preschool.

Keywords: identity development, preschool education, teacher views

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Introduction

Childhood and adolescence are expressed as the periods when the individual is interested in understanding himself clearly, that is, informing an identity (Trawick-Swith, 2014). Identity, in the most general sense, who am I? It can be explained as a concept that includes the answer given to the question (Atak, 2011), provides individual recognition, and expresses the characteristic features that create the feeling of belonging to a group (Bredekamp, 2015). People tend to reveal their identities over and over again according to a bag of tricks (Maslow, 2001).

From the perspective of children, the expression "bag of tricks" can be considered as conditions and even rights that are important to provide and sustain for children. Because valuing childhood includes seeing this period as an important period in which children gain an identity (Elkind, 1999). In the 40th session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child held in 2005, it was stated that children in the younger age group quickly understand the people and events around them, along with their own identities, thanks to their sensitivity to their environment. With this understanding, it has been stated that children form their own identities and acquire various values through interactions with their environment (Legal Gazette, 2005).

Children need to understand that they are both unique and similar to other children to develop a positive identity. Therefore, being able to recognize and share their interests (Bredekamp 2015), communicate with their peers (Raburu, 2015), and find opportunities for situations such as games

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where they reflect and reinterpret situations related to their real-life experiences are important aspects for their identity construction (CCSA 2021, (Aydeniz & Hodge, 2011) Teachers are one of the most important enablers, both individually and socially, and culturally. Studies show that teachers, both as role models and as practitioners of the curriculum, are guiding in the construction of identity and self-development (Karasu Avcı & İbret, 2016; Kayama & Yamakawa, 2020; Keskinkılıç Kara, 2016; Ramazan & Çiftçi, 2020; Sigurdardottir, Williams, & Einarsdottir, 2019; Swanson, Cunningham, Youngblood, & Spencer, 2009)

Identity has the function of understanding who we are and who other people are, and that other people mutually understand themselves and other people (Jenkins, 2016). As emphasized in this function, identity, which has both personal and social aspects, can be considered primarily as a part of a person's concerns and identifications with another individual with the identity in question (Goffman, 2009; Jenkins, 2016). Although the person tends to think individually, his collective coexistence and therefore his social structure does not allow this. Children also learn about collective unity at school age and take their parents, peers, and teachers as role models. Social identity, which Goffman calls the difference that distinguishes one from others, can also be associated with public life in general terms, with strangers or people who are only seen as acquaintances (Goffman, 2014).

Social identity, which Durkheim explains as collective consciousness, appears as the interaction of people with each other and the representation of everything common in society. When evaluated from a sociological point of view, Durkheim does not separate the individual from the society, which is brought to the fore by the science of psychology. According to him, religion, politics, morals and educational institutions are all a result of the social structure. The individual is also a part of these structures. In his eyes, society has an uniquie (sui genereis) structure and the actions of individuals have no share in this structure (Durkheim, 1950). Talking about being a part of a society, similar to Goffman, Durkheim implies that individuals have a kind of obligation to be a part of this society. He also states that when individuals do not conform to society, they will feel a social pressure and as a result of this pressure, adaptation will be inevitable. However, social facts are presented to the individual as a set of imperatives in ready-made patterns.

Durkheim argues that people are obliged to apply a social role offered to them within these obligations, within the family or in the social position they have acquired. These social roles arise from the necessity of being a part of the society. Again, these social roles transform them as responsibilities, duties and sanctions. Parsons, on the other hand, takes this obligation of adaptation one step further and claims that deviance occurs if the individual does not fit into society (Parsons, 1951).

Culture is a concept related to identity and social identity, as individuals acquire identity as a result of their experiences in the social context (Milner, 2010). How a person looks at himself, how he sees his essence; The issue of how it organizes its values and ideals also includes the scope of the elements of culture (Uygur, 1996, p. 17). Culture, which is one of the basic phenomena of behavior patterns, affects the behavior of individuals (Köktürk, 2018). These patterns of behavior are repeated, conveying to us how we are expected to behave in which situation and guide socialization. From the age of 3-4, children have a large number of frameworks related to these increasingly complex patterns, and their social development can be evaluated by considering the acquisition of these frameworks (Elkind, 1999). As it can be understood, culture has various signs and these signs include identity indicators of an individual or a community (Milner, 2010).

Milner (2010) says that there is an interaction between culture, curriculum, and identity. It sees the curriculum as the context in which students have the opportunity to learn, while it sees teachers as learners in the school through culture and identity. From this point of view, the opinions of teachers about identity and identity development, which they inevitably form through their cultural background, are important. Because unavoidably, the views of teachers that will reflect on their practices have the power to influence students. In addition, based on the fact that teachers are the implementers of the training program, seeking their opinions in the training program will allow comparing the situations that are intended to be reflected in practice with the situations that may be reflected. The pre-school education program being implemented in Turkey was published by the Ministry of National Education (MEB, 2013). The program prepared for the education of 36-72 months old children is based on the gains and indicators. In addition, the learning centers that are recommended to be organized to meet

the children's playing needs are explained in the program. The teacher in the program; is expressed as one of the main determinants that affect the quality of preschool education and the development of the child (MEB 2013).

Research Questions

Considering the social aspect of identity development, one of the social environments in which children receiving pre-school education are in is the institutions where they receive education.

Teachers who are responsible for providing education in these institutions are individuals belonging to the social environment that can affect the identity development of children. In addition, they are adults who have the competence to systematically observe the identity development of children thanks to the vocational training they receive.

It is stated that there is a need for research to understand which mechanisms play a role in the shaping of identity by early education (Daniel, 2021). For this reason, in this study, it is aimed to learn the views of preschool teachers, who are the practitioners of the earliest systematic education in which children are involved, on the concept of identity and the identity development of preschool children.

Since pre-school education is given in line with an education program, it has also been tried to reveal how the related program includes identity development. Finally, the opinions of the teachers were examined in comparison with the data obtained from the preschool education program, since they are the implementers of the education program.

In this direction, the research questions can be stated as follows:

1. How do preschool teachers explain the concept of identity?

2. How do preschool teachers explain the concept of identity development of children?

3. When the pre-school education program implemented in Turkey is examined in the context of social identity, what kind of data does it contain, as stated by the teachers?

Methodology

In this study, which tries to reveal the views of preschool teachers on the identity development of children, it is thought that the qualitative research approach "focusing on the meaning in the context" and "concerned with understanding the meanings created by people" is suitable for the purpose of the study. In this case study (Merriam, 2013) which is one of the qualitative research types and makes it possible to obtain descriptive results through an inductive inquiry process, interviews were conducted with the participants in an online environment with open-ended questions (Patton, 2004)

The teachers invited as participants in the study work in institutions with different characteristics (state and private institutions). This situation is preferred because pre-school education is given in both public and private schools in Turkey. Public schools provide education following the official curriculum accepted by the Ministry of National Education. On the other hand, private schools can create their education models in addition to this curriculum. Purposive sampling was used to get the opinions of the teachers, who work in public and private schools on identity development, and interviews were conducted with 10 pre-school teachers who volunteered to participate in the study. Five of these teachers work in public schools, and five in private schools. all teachers participating in the study are women. The age of teachers varies between 26-47, and their seniority is between 1-18 years. 5 teachers work in private schools, and 5 work in public schools. Each teacher works in different schools, ensuring diversity regarding school culture and program. 2 of the participants are single, and 8 of them are married. The demographic characteristics of the participants are included in Table 1.

Table 1

The Demographic Characteristics of The Participants

Code Name	Age	Gender	Years of Teaching Experience	Institution
Ayça	33		6	Private school
Burcu	45		18	
Yeşim	47		14	
Sevgi	39		18	
Ece	26		5	
		Female		
Gülşah	37		14	Public school
Mine	35		11	
Reyhan	26		1	
Simge	40		15	
Deniz	31		9	

Data Collecting

Within the scope of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers. The relevant literature was reviewed, and expert opinions were taken to prepare the interview questions. In addition, pilot interviews were conducted with two teachers, one working in a public school and one in a private school. At the end of these processes, a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of twelve main questions was formed to be asked to the participants. Some of these questions are as follows; "What does the concept of "identity" mean to you when you think about types of identity (ethnic identity, religious identity, political identity, sexual identity, etc.)?; Do you think "identity" is an innate quality, is it acquired or both are effective on identity? From where? If the answer is "both", which one seems stronger? From where?; What does the concept of "identity development" mean to you?; According to you, what are the factors affecting identity development?" After the interview questions were prepared, the implementation was started. The interviews took around 50-80 minutes. Interviews with all teachers were completed in approximately 30 days. The interviews were conducted online at the request of the teachers and recorded with their permission.

Before the interview, it was stated to the teachers that they were completely free in their answers to the questions, and that the important thing was their opinions. Since identity is a dynamic concept that includes the views of individuals on common activities in a particular community (Aydeniz & Hodge, 2011) an open-ended question was asked to the teachers at the beginning of the interviews, which required them to explain what the concept of identity meant to them. Teachers tended to refer to identity development in the content of their explanations to this question. Thus, further questions shaped according to the teachers' statements to this introductory question were asked when appropriate; or related questions were asked when the teacher made a statement about a question to be asked to deepen their statements. While preparing the questions, the factors associated with identity development in the literature were taken into consideration. First of all, it was tried to learn the opinions of teachers about which factors they think affect identity development. Considering the effect of communication with peers and experiences on identity development, questions were asked about teachers' observations in these contexts and their evaluations of these observations. Based on the fact that identity development is a dynamic process, it has been tried to determine the opinions of teachers about the future effects of situations encountered in the preschool period in the context of identity development. It has been tried to learn the opinions of teachers about the effects of teachers on identity development as people with whom children are in intense communication.

Analysis of Data

MAXQDA 2020 PLUS qualitative analysis program was used to analyze the data. Interview texts were transcribed and then coded. Based on the MAXQDA 2020 program, a hierarchical coding model was used to present the data.

In cases where more than one person is involved in the analysis, it is recommended to create the codes independently and then discuss the similarities and differences of the generated codes (Patton 2004). Following this suggestion, the researchers first coded the obtained data separately. Then, the created codes were compared, and the first cycle of the coding process was completed. In addition, two experts with previous qualitative research experience were asked to code the data. The codes created by the researchers and coming from the experts were compared and finalized. Codes are the elements that explain the subject's essence, whereas categories are the patterns created by the codes. Creating categories through codes and reaching other constructs from categories (theme/concept-claim/theory) is seen as the synthesis (Saldano, 2019). After the coding was completed, the codes belonging to the same category were grouped and categorized. The collection of the categories under specific themes was performed in the light of the literature, and 2 different themes were formed: "identity reflections", "identity development factors".

Ethics reviews

For qualitative research, the ethical problem arises from the anxiety arising from bad results such as distorting and changing the results of the research. Therefore, it is necessary to take some precautions to avoid these consequences. Among these, the participants; It is necessary to inform them that participation in research is voluntary, that some aspects of the research may affect them, and that they can freely terminate participation in any part of the research (Glesne, 2013).

Participation in this research was provided on a voluntary basis. Interviews were held online at the request of the participants. During the interview, verbal consent was obtained from the participants regarding the recording of the audio and their consent was recorded. The names of the participants were encoded in the text and it was stated that their identities would not be shared with anyone. The information that the data to be obtained will be used in an academic research was shared with the participants. It has been stated that they can withdraw from the study at any time.

Findings

In this part of the study, participants' statements regarding the themes that emerged during the research process and the categories under these themes were interpreted, and their equivalents in the curriculum were discussed. As a result of the analysis, teachers' views on identity and identity development were grouped under 2 themes: *identity reflections, identity development factors*.
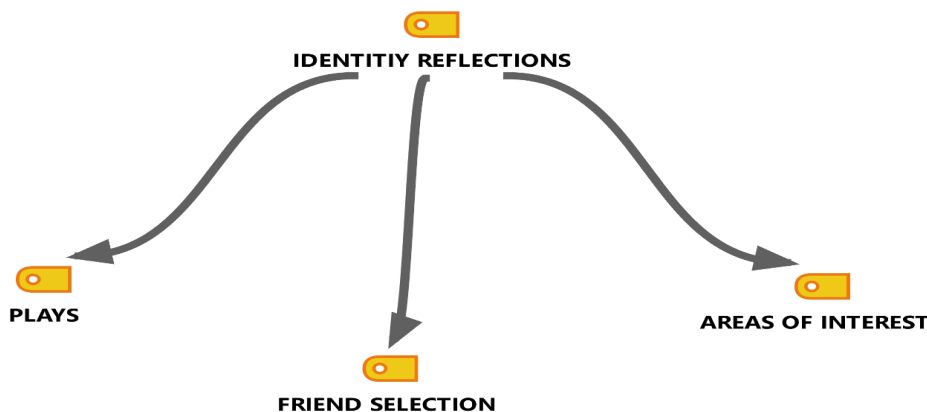
Identity Reflections

Figure 1

Hierarchical coding model for identity reflections

The theme of identity reflections shown in Figure 1 is related to the observability of children's identities. The categories under this theme are *friend selection, plays, and areas of interest*. Teachers stated that children's identities are reflected in their choice of friends, plays, and areas of interest and can be noticed through observations. The general developmental characteristics of the pre-school period are an essential factor related to this theme. Teachers stated that as a characteristic of the age period they live in, children show how other people influence them and how they want things to be, especially in their plays and areas of interest, in an entirely unfiltered way:

> *"Children unconsciously include these in their conversations and dialogues while they are playing together." Reyhan*

Although teachers attach importance to the choice of friends in terms of identity reflections, they think that it will contain more decisive and conscious reflections at later ages. Regarding the choice of friends, the teachers emphasized that the children prefer to befriend peers having similar characteristics with them. In this regard, they stated that children particularly care about being respected:

> *" children who are kind or emphatic also prefer an emphatic friend. They don't want to befriend the person lacking empathy, who makes them feel bad; they don't want to befriend the person who doesn't respect him." Simge*

Teachers stated the play as an environment where children express themselves more easily. Play, where the development of social identities can be easily observed in the classroom environment, includes processes in which children develop themselves by including peer interaction. The play, which includes peer interaction and can be constructed in many different ways, is supportive by offering different options in the identity development process of children, as it provides different conditions and experiences to children. After hearing from the teachers the importance of play and peer interaction in the context of identity development, when the place of these concepts in the education program (MEB, 2013) is examined, regarding the choice of friend, it is seen that the statement "The teacher … records which friends of the children … mostly … prefer to play with in the notebook" is included (MEB, 2013, p. 38). The curriculum states that observing friends that children prefer to play with provides information to the teacher about the child. It is also stated that "*Children recognize themselves and the world they live in through play and express themselves best during play,*" (MEB, 2013, p. 15)indicating that children find the opportunity to get to know themselves and make reflections about themselves during the play. Teachers agree that the play reflects children's identities; this characteristic is included in the curriculum with the opportunity it creates for the children to get to know themselves. Regarding the equivalent of the areas of interest category in the curriculum, the sections on the implementation of the activities and the children's learning center's preferences contain statements related to this category.

Interests, play and peer interaction were expressed by teachers as factors that can give clues about children's identity development. When the content of the education program is examined, the importance of systematic observation of children in terms of relevant factors emerges. In this way, children will be supported and it will be easier to prepare environments where they can express themselves. As it is widely recognized that the early years are crucial for personality development and identity building, there is a need for educational programs that support children and families, particularly those from linguistic and ethnic minorities and low-income backgrounds (Mousena, 2018). The fact that the above-mentioned factors are included in the education program published by the Ministry of National Education and that teachers also observe these factors is considered important especially in terms of supporting disadvantaged children.

Identity development factors

Figure 2

Hierarchical coding model for identity development factors
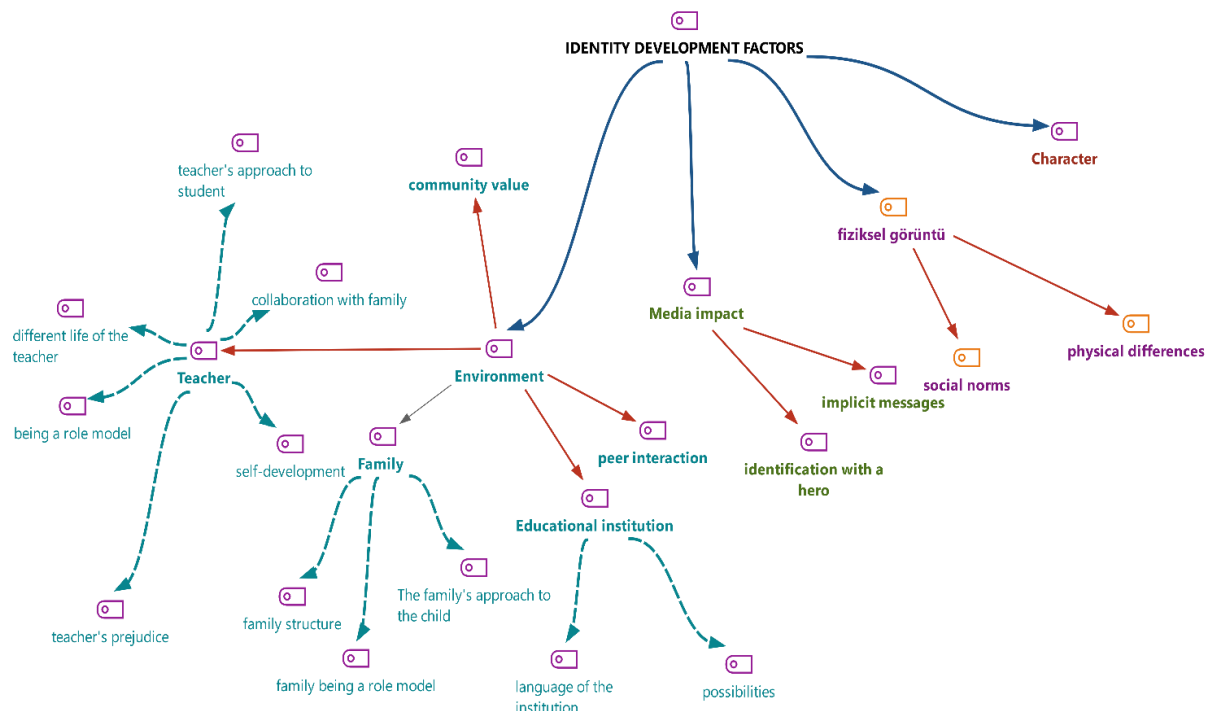
The theme of identity development factors shown in Figure 2 is related to factors that affect identity development and how they affect it. Teachers stated that the child's **physical appearance, family, environment, media impact, and character** affect identity development.

Teachers stated that for children having physical disabilities or significant differences in physical appearance become one of the factors affecting identity development through the way social norms approach these situations:

> *"I think the disabled child is affected." Burcu*

> *"I honestly think that a change in physique, appearance, skin color, being fat or thin, all of these leave a mark on the individual." Reyhan*

Teachers stated that children's character is an important factor in the course of their identity development and that the identity development of children in similar conditions may differ due to their unique characteristics:

> *"The two characters are not the same. When I treat them the same way, one can be good and the other bad." Simge*

Teachers evaluated the media, which emerged as one of the factors affecting identity development, as a factor that may direct the child through implicit messages; children may **identify themselves with the heroes** seen in various media products and adopt their negative characteristics. Even when they mentioned the positive aspects of the media, they explained them by comparing them with the harmful effects of media and by underlining the orientation feature of the media.

> *"For example, when children watch violent series or cartoons, they begin to tend towards violence, in contrast when they watch loving, affectionate content, a soft personality begins to emerge in the child." Ece*

> *"I think that all the judgments given in the cartoon are engraved in children's subconscious, which in turn affects their behavior and personality development."*
> *Reyhan*

The teachers discussed the role of the family in identity development from various interrelated aspects. They stated that the approach of the families towards the child, the characteristics of the environments they provide, and the behaviors they exhibit emerge in an observable way in the child:

> *"Children try to get whatever the family cares about. Their role model is their parents anyway."* Burcu

> *"Let's imagine a family living with a mother-in-law. No matter how the mother tries to display consistent attitudes and tries to make joint decisions with the father, it is one of the factors that negatively affect the child's support for identity development, as long as there is a behavior that destroys them in the family, and as long as there is a behavior that destroys the attitudes of the mother and father."* Ayça

The environment, which is one of the factors affecting identity development, includes social values, peer interaction, the structure of educational institutions, and teacher characteristics. Teachers addressed social values regarding the flexibility or rigidity they offer the child. On the other hand, they addressed peer interaction in the context of children having the opportunity to observe the similarities and differences with each other, taking the others as an example, and imitating them:

> *"As they get to know their friends, as they see different traits on them, they discover their differences and similarities, and realize what can happen or what they can do, by expanding with their imagination a little bit. I think their friends have a big impact."* Sevgi

The educational institution was evaluated regarding the opportunities provided to children and the consistency of the institution within itself. Teachers stated that the opportunities provided in educational institutions could affect identity development by enabling children to make discoveries and have different experiences:

> *"The wider the education institution thinks, the more different opportunities they can provide. The trips, other opportunities."* Simge

> *"I sincerely think we need to create an environment where children could express themselves freely and comfortably in the classroom."* Reyhan

Among the factors affecting identity development, the teacher is the most mentioned factor. It is seen as effective from many different aspects. The factors mentioned in identity development are teachers' approach to the children, different experience opportunities they provide, their efforts for self-development, the role model they offer for children, and their cooperation with families. At the same time, the teacher reflecting his/her prejudices on any subject to children is also seen as a factor affecting identity development.

> *"The calmer the teacher is, the clearer the teacher is, the children move in that direction and gain their identity in that direction."* Gülşah

> *"If the teacher has prejudices, as he/she would give examples in this regard, the children will inevitably adopt them subconsciously, by saying "if my teacher said this, then it is true" and they will start to develop their thoughts in this direction."* Reyhan

No statements address physical image and character effects regarding identity development in the pre-school curriculum. Some media products are recommended for providing different experiences and permanence in learning centers, achievements, and activity types regarding the media factor. The media factor was included in the curriculum (MEB, 2013) by expressing its positive aspects:

> *"The facts such as … should be tried to be gained through stories, animations, book reviews, films, and documentaries." (MEB, 2013, p. 23)"A book center is a place where children can examine printed materials, look at books/magazines, etc. sometimes sitting on a table, sometimes lying on a mat,"* (MEB, 2013, p. 40)

Family is a factor that teachers emphasize in terms of identity development. Similarly, the importance of the family for the child was stated in the education program (MEB, 2013) and the necessity of school-family cooperation was emphasized. It was also stated that the teacher, who is one of the most important actors of cooperation, should improve himself:

> *"Family is one of the most critical factors affecting the child's development, social cohesion, and success." (MEB, 2013, p. 12)"The child's feeling of safety in social relations and acquiring the necessary skills is the result of establishing a healthy and trusting relationship with family members." (MEB, 2013, p. 13)*

> *"Teachers should determine their interests, abilities, and orientations on …. and evaluate themselves by reviewing their personality traits; they should work to improve themselves according to their proficiency level in different fields and to access resources (MEB, 2013, p. 56)"When the teacher develops a consistent and secure relationship with the child, … he/she supports the child's development…." (MEB, 2013, p. 13)*

When the education program (MEB, 2013) is examined in terms of peer interaction and social value, while the importance of supporting peer interaction is clearly stated, it is seen that there are general statements that include the child's ability to take part in society by adapting to social values:

> *"A large area should be arranged as the dramatic play center to support children playing freely, interacting with each other and creating different play scenarios." (MEB, 2013, p. 42)"Time to start the day helps children attune to each other… and with their teachers is ensured." (MEB, 2013, p. 52)*

> *"It is important for children to know the values of the society in which they live in to grow up as responsible individuals." (MEB, 2013, p. 17)"The right attitudes should be given to children through activities so that they can internalize the rules necessary for the continuation of social life." (MEB, 2013, p. 29).*

The effect of the environment and the opportunities in the environment, the communication with people and the formation of the teacher's identity development is very important (Esquivel, Elam, Paris, & Tafoya, 2022). For this reason, the factors stated by the teachers and the correspondence of these factors in the preschool education program are considered as a positive situation. However, it is thought that there should be more explanatory and emphasizing contents regarding the relevant factors in the preschool education program. Thus, it is thought that teachers can be more confident about what they can do about the factors affecting children's identity development. Thus, it will be possible to prepare developmental environments for children in the process of identity development so that they can perceive both the situations that originate from themselves and the situations that arise from their relations with other people.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, which tries to reveal the views of preschool teachers on the identity development of children, it has been seen that the participant teachers, each working in a different preschool education institution, associate the identity development in the preschool period with self-development. The fact that children begin to define themselves primarily with their concrete characteristics in the preschool period and this situation becomes abstract over time shows the importance of teachers' supporting children in this process (Schunk, 2009). The support of the family, one of the providers of this support, has a very important place in terms of self-development (Ergüden, Doğan, and Hastaoğlu 2020, Polat et al. 2021). However, we can say it is not enough for the family to support the child's self-development alone. For example, according to a study conducted in North Korea, the experiences of professional babysitters, teachers, and people who have sufficient experience in child care contribute to the social-emotional development of children (Lim, Kim, & Lee, 2021). On the other hand, the work of professional care services in harmony with the family provides positive feedback on establishing close relationships with the child (Luckey, Lang, & Jeon, 2021).

According to a country-wide study conducted by Alexiadou (Mother Child Education Foundation) in Turkey in 2017, the rate of enrollment in primary school at the age of 5 is much higher for children from disadvantaged families than children from wealthy and educated families (AÇEV, 2017). This data

means that disadvantaged children leave pre-school education earlier and children who need more developmental support move to a more academic education level. The fact that children who are only 5 years old and in the disadvantaged group leave their families and the preschool education level, which cooperates more with families than other education levels, is a factor that may lead to an earlier decrease in the support that children will receive in areas related to identity development.

Finding clear goals that will support children's positive identity development in the education program of which the teacher is the implementer can give the teacher a roadmap to progress by feeling confident. Different from the pre-school education program being implemented in Turkey, when the education programs for the early childhood period of some countries or various official reports of these programs are examined, it is seen that the concept of "identity" is clearly expressed. For example; in the report on the education program and its implementation published in Australia, it was stated that children have a strong sense of identity, and in this direction, the connection between their identities and their relations with society and learning and development outcomes was mentioned (Acecqa, 2016).

Similarly, in the kindergarten education program guide published in Hong Kong, it is mentioned that children passing from kindergarten to primary school will experience an identity change. It has also been stated that children can gain identity sensitivity through social interaction experiences (Council, 2017). In Sweden, at a much earlier date, in 1972, a commission on early childhood education stated that they shaped their pedagogical approach based on Piaget and Erikson's views on development. The pedagogy model proposed by this commission is one in which children are in constant dialogue with other people and society for their identity development (Alexiadou, Hjelmér, Laiho, & Pihlaja, 2022).

Apart from training programs; As a school culture, giving children an identity in the preschool period reveals how much it is related to their mental and physical development. Depending on ethnic diversity; It can be said that children's teachers, who belong to a different ethnic identity from themselves, take role models in terms of identity (Earick 2010). This process of identity difference will help children adopt a democratic and participatory education process in the early period. Russel argues that democratic and contemporary education will lead to an identity awareness in children, and this understanding may differ from Rossue and Locke's contemporary but discriminatory education structure (Russel, 2009). In this way, children accept that there can be different identities in society, both emotionally and logically. Therefore, this situation reveals that a reality that is very different from what the education program teaches can be encountered. This reality is that children are in a directly participatory classroom climate and there are elements in this climate that enable them to realize their own identities. Moreover, in order for these identities to be freely expressed by children, it is necessary to listen to them in real terms, to identify their needs for attention and desire, and to acquire vital skills specific to a democratic society (Marsh et al. 2020, 10). These skills, which are expected to be acquired by preschool children, should be structured in accordance with their level, such as games, creative drama, painting, and fairy tales (Earick, 2010; Elizova & Karataeva, 2019; Lazarić, Drandić, & Bruner, 2020; Raburu, 2015)

According to a report prepared by the European Union (EU) on early childhood education, a quality early childhood education lays the foundations for social integration and a successful life in the future (EU, 2021). This situation has a special importance for disadvantaged children. From the perspective of Turkey, pre-school education is particularly emphasized for disadvantaged children. However, although planning according to the needs of children is emphasized in the teacher competencies published by the Ministry of National Education, it is seen that there are no details about what these needs might be and how they can be connected with the culture of the region and universal values (MEB, 2017). During the interviews, none of the participants mentioned the content of the training program on teacher identity development or any publications published throughout the country. Although there were teachers who expressed their opinion that educational institutions could be effective, they limited this effect to the personal characteristics of the individuals working in the institutions, and to nothing related to the education policies of the country, they did not mention. Considering that identity awareness develops gradually from childhood to adulthood (Hurduzeu, 2017), it is thought that an understanding that will spread to all education levels and frame guides to be determined are required.

In Turkey, giving identity to children in the pre-school period is not included in a clear and detailed form within the scope of pre-school education program, and in parallel with this, the teachers participating in the research stated that gaining identity is carried out by adhering to environmental influences such as school, family, teacher, and peers. They did not mention the content of the training program. Including the necessary details to support identity development in the education program will enable teachers to receive more support from the education program. For this reason, it may be recommended to include sections in the education program where identity development is linked to other areas of development.

Teachers who explain identity development generally together with self-development stated that self-development is related to pre-school children's self-expression. In addition, the education program also provides information that play and art activities contribute significantly to self-development through the functions of supporting children's self-expression in different ways. It is thought that it would be better to give the framework about how the reflection on the education process can be as well as the information given in the education program.

Suggestion

In this research, the teachers whose opinions were taken on identity and identity development are people who were born and raised in the same country and know similar cultural backgrounds. Similar studies and comparative analyzes can be carried out with preschool teachers who were born and raised in different countries or received their vocational education in different countries.

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