



# The analysis of educational philosophy trends among pre-school teachers

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## Abstract

The present study is a descriptive research conducted with the quantitative research method and aimed to determine and analyze the educational philosophy trends among pre-school teachers and the effects of various variables on their educational philosophy orientations. The study was conducted with 381 pre-school teachers attending İnönü University, Faculty of Education, Department of Preschool Education, during the 2019-2020 academic year fall semester. The "Educational Beliefs Scale" developed by Yılmaz, Altinkurt and Çokluk (2011) was employed to collect the study data. In data analysis, the educational philosophy trends among the pre-service teachers were determined initially. The consistency of the identified trends with the educational philosophy adopted in the MEB Preschool Curriculum was determined, and the data were compared based on various variables. The fact that most participants adopted existentialism and progressivism and the least number of participants adopted essentialism revealed that the pre-service teachers adopted contemporary educational philosophies. It was also concluded that a higher number of pre-service teachers who graduated from departments with equal numerical and verbal weight adopted progressivism when compared to those who graduated from numerical departments, and the difference was significant. Also, as student seniority increased, the educational philosophy trends among the pre-service teachers changed from conventional educational philosophies to contemporary educational philosophies. The present study was approved by Inonu University Ethics Committee on 14.01.2021 (No:9). Recommendations are presented for educators, educational programmers and future studies

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**Keywords:** Educational beliefs; curriculum; educational approach; philosophical belief; philosophical approach.

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## 1. Introduction

The first step of formal education for children, preschool education could be considered as a transitional stage between the immediate environment (family) and wider social structures. Preschool teachers play a key role in this transitional stage, lead, prepare, organize the children, implement the educational environment and provide a role model for them.

It could be argued that the views, attitudes, beliefs and orientations of the teachers, who prepare the learning environment, would determine the education that they develop

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and implement. Bandura (1977) reported that individuals' beliefs and orientations directly affect their behavior. Doğanay and Sarı (2003) stated that teachers, the developers of the learning environment, determine the learning outcomes, select instructional principles and methods, and assess and evaluate the students based on their knowledge, skills, attitudes, views and beliefs. Thus, it could be suggested that the perspectives and beliefs of the teachers directly affect the class, and the determination of the educational philosophy beliefs of pre-service teachers would give an idea about the practices of the group in the educational environment.

In the foundation of all curricula lies the methodology of training individuals. Curricula are developed with this objective according and the type of the individual in training is expected to be consistent with the philosophy of the curriculum (Demirel, 2015). However, sometimes expectations and reality may differ. For example, although there is only one curriculum developed by the Ministry of National Education in Turkey, there are several types of individuals. Although various environmental factors affect this outcome, it could be suggested that the educational philosophies adopted by the practitioners could have an impact.

The determination of the educational philosophy trends among teachers and pre-service teachers, who are the teachers of the future, could play a key role in the development of education programs. Because, if educational program developers have knowledge and ideas about the philosophical trends among the practitioners, they can approach existing or potential problems from a more accurate perspective. Teacher training programs could be organized based on research findings to ensure the training of the practitioners (teachers) consistent with the objectives of the curriculum. Because the consistency between the educational philosophies adopted by the curriculum and the teachers, who are the implementers of the curriculum, is important for the success of the curriculum. In the United States, Charlesworth et al. (1991) determined that teachers whose educational philosophy is similar to that of the curriculum plan, implement and control education better than others. This demonstrated that the consistency of the educational philosophy trends and the philosophy of the curriculum is a significant factor in the implementation of the curriculum.

The preschool curriculum implemented by the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Turkey since 2013 was introduced as a child-oriented program. The curriculum aimed to provide rich learning experiences, support the development of motor, social, emotional, language, cognitive, and gain self-care skills and prepare the students for primary school (MEB, 2013). According to Tuncer (2015), there are similarities between the objectives and philosophies of prominent preschool education approaches such as Montessori, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia, Head Start, High/Scope, Open Education and Primary Years programs and MEB 2013 Pre-School curriculum. Thus, it could be suggested that the MEB preschool curriculum was developed based on the contemporary educational approaches.

The success of the program, developed based on the contemporary educational approaches and philosophies, depends on the adoption of the same contemporary educational philosophies by the teachers who are the implementers of the curriculum.

Since educational philosophies are based on general philosophies, these could be considered as a reflection of the latter on education. For example, while perennialism was mostly influenced by idealism and realism, progressivism was based on pragmatism (Doğanay & Sarı, 2003). Although they focus on different areas, since all approaches focus on education, they are not separate or independent.

In the present study, the educational philosophies in the sub-dimensions of the employed scale were categorized in two groups: conventional and contemporary educational philosophies. The conventional educational philosophies included the teacher-oriented perennialism and essentialism, which are based on strict discipline (Erkılıç et al., 2011). The contemporary educational philosophies included the student-oriented progressivism, reconstructionism and existentialism, which are based on active learning and aim the development of creativity (Erkılıç et al., 2011; Gutek, 1998; Kneller, 1964). The adopted categorization aimed an analytical and simple narrative.

The review of the studies on educational philosophy demonstrated that these were mainly on educational beliefs and educational philosophy preferences. Since educational philosophy could be adopted unconsciously as well as due to individual preferences or beliefs, in the present study, the concept was scrutinized as educational philosophy trends.

Several international studies have been conducted on educational philosophy trends among teachers and pre-service teachers. For example, the impact of teachers' philosophical orientation on the success of the Early Childhood Education Program, which was implemented in the United States in 1986, was closely investigated. Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, and Hernandez (1991) reported that instruction of the teachers with a philosophical orientation similar to the that adopted in the curriculum was more consistent with the curriculum objectives.

In the present study, it was assumed that preschool pre-service teachers could adopt various educational philosophies throughout their lives, consciously or unconsciously. It was considered that there may be differences between the educational philosophy orientations of pre-service teachers due to the educational environment and environmental factors. These differences may lead to different perspectives towards the educational process among the pre-service teachers. Thus, pre-service teachers could adopt different attitudes towards the educational objectives and functions, and their roles. It is inevitable that these different interpretations will be reflected in the classroom environment. Thus, the following problem statements were determined in the study.

1. The educational philosophy orientations of preschool pre-service teachers are similar to which educational philosophy?
2. Do the educational philosophy orientations of preschool pre-service teachers differ based on their school seniority?
3. Do the educational philosophy orientations of preschool pre-service teachers differ based on their attendance in a school at their place of residence?
4. Do the educational philosophy orientations of preschool pre-service teachers differ based on the type of high school they graduated?

5. Do the educational philosophy orientations of preschool pre-service teachers differ based on whether they took the educational philosophy course?

## 2. Method

The present quantitative study was conducted with the survey model. Survey studies aim to describe a current case as is (Karasar, 2012). This method was preferred since the study aimed to determine the educational philosophy orientations of pre-school pre-service teachers. The details of the study are as follows:

### 2.1. Participants

The study population included 544 preschool pre-service teachers attending İnönü University, Faculty of Education, Department of Preschool Education, during the 2019-2020 academic year fall semester.

Since the research is a descriptive study, a high sample size was aimed. Thus, the study aimed to describe the current status of the phenomenon as close as possible to the reality. Since it was difficult to conduct the study with the entire population due to time, labor and cost constraints, the authors aimed to conduct the study on 75% of the population and the scale was sent to 408 pre-service teachers assigned by random sampling. Among these, 381 pre-service teachers responded. The ratio of the sample size to the population was 70.00%. 80.6% (N=307) of the participants were female and 19.4% (N=74) were male.

### 2.2. Data Collection Instruments

The quantitative study data were collected with the Education Beliefs Scale developed by Yılmaz, Altinkurt and Çokluk (2011). The 5-point Likert type scale includes 5 sub-dimensions; perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, reconstructionism and existentialism. The participants declare their agreement with scale items by giving scores between 1 and 5. A high mean sub-dimension score indicates a high tendency towards this educational philosophy. A low mean sub-dimension score indicates a low tendency towards this educational philosophy. The item and sub-dimension scores were determined, and then the data were analyzed with statistical software to determine the educational philosophy trends among pre-service teachers. The scale does not yield a total core due to its structure.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

To determine the tests that would be employed in the analysis, normal distribution of the data was analyzed. Since the sample size was over 30, normality was tested with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (Can, 2018). The results of the normality test are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Normal distribution test

Sub-Dimension	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistics	Sd	P	Statistics	Sd	P
Perennialism	,113	381	,00	,966	381	,00
Fundamentalism	,086	381	,00	,969	381	,00
Progressivism	,159	381	,00	,856	381	,00
Reconstructionism	,068	381	,00	,983	381	,00
Existentialism	,222	381	,00	,962	381	,00

As seen in Table-1, the data size was over 30. Thus, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results were analyzed, and it was observed that the data did not exhibit normal distribution in all sub-dimensions ( $p < 0.05$ ). Accordingly, non-parametric tests were employed to determine the correlations between the philosophical orientations of preschool teachers and preschool pre-service teachers. Mann Whitney U test is employed when the number of groups is two in inter-group comparisons, and when the number of groups is three or more, the Kruskal Wallis test is employed. The Mann Whitney U test was used to determine the inter-group differences based on the Kruskal Wallis test results (Can, 2018). The results were analyzed at 95% confidence interval and  $p < 0.05$  significance level.

### 3. Findings

To determine the answer to the main research question; “The educational philosophy orientations of preschool pre-service teachers are similar to which educational philosophy,” the study data were analyzed with the descriptive method. The findings are presented in Table-2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on the Educational Philosophy Orientations of Pre-Service Teachers

Educational Philosophy	N	X̄	SD
Perennialism	381	3,99	,56
Fundamentalism	381	2,37	,81
Progressivism	381	4,52	,45
Reconstructionism	381	3,87	,62
Existentialism	381	4,62	,48

As seen in Table-2, the mean educational philosophy orientation scores of pre-service teachers were ranked as existentialism ( $\bar{X}=4.62$ ,  $SD=.48$ ), progressivism ( $\bar{X}=4.52$ ,  $SD=.45$ ), perennialism ( $\bar{X}=3.99$ ,  $SD=.56$ ), reconstructionism ( $\bar{X}=3.87$ ,  $Ss=.62$ ), and fundamentalism ( $\bar{X}=2.37$ ,  $SD=.81$ ) in descending order. The fact that the highest number of participants adopted existentialism and progressivism and the lowest number of participants adopted essentialism demonstrated that they mostly adopted contemporary educational philosophies. It could be suggested that the adoption of contemporary and child-centered education philosophies by the preschool pre-service teachers would promote the achievement of preschool curriculum objectives.

Table 3. Kruskal-Wallis H-Test Results on educational philosophy orientations of pre-service teachers based on seniority

Sub-Dimension	Class	N	Mean Rank	S.D.	X <sup>2</sup>	P	Diff.
Perennialism	1	77	212,03	3	4,889	,180	-
	2	110	186,97	3			
	3	98	193,93	3			
	4	96	175,76	3			
Fundamentalism	1	77	214,90	3	9,738	,021*	1-4
	2	110	199,60	3			2-4
	3	98	187,93	3			
	4	96	165,11	3			
Progressivism	1	77	197,12	3	,913	,822	-
	2	110	183,02	3			
	3	98	191,92	3			
	4	96	194,30	3			
Reconstructionism	1	77	221,84	3	7,819	,50	-
	2	110	183,65	3			
	3	98	186,54	3			
	4	96	179,24	3			
Existentialism	1	77	188,99	3	1,773	,621	-
	2	110	181,85	3			
	3	98	192,62	3			
	4	96	201,44	3			

\* Significant difference ( $p<0.05$ )

As seen in Table-3, the Kruskal-Wallis H test conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference between the educational philosophy orientations of pre-service teachers based on the seniority variable revealed a significant difference in the essentialism dimensions ( $X^2_{(3)}=9,738$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), but not in perennialism ( $X^2_{(3)}=4,889$ ;  $p>0.05$ ), progressivism ( $X^2_{(3)}=0,913$ ;  $p>0.05$ ), reconstructionism ( $X^2_{(3)}=7,819$ ;  $p>0.05$ ), and existentialism ( $X^2_{(3)}=1,773$ ;  $p>0.05$ ) dimensions. The multiple comparisons conducted with the Mann-Whitney U test to determine the source of the significant difference

revealed that the significant difference in the essentialism dimension favored the freshmen against the seniors, and sophomores against the seniors. In other words, it was concluded that the number of freshmen and sophomore pre-service teachers who adopted essentialism was significantly higher when compared to the seniors.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U-Test Results on educational philosophy orientations of pre-service teachers based on place of residence (PoR)

Sub-Dimension	PoR	N	Mean Rank	Total Rank	U	P
Perennialism	Malatya	131	188,38	24677,50	15670,500	,856
	Other	242	186,25	45073,50		
Fundamentalism	Malatya	131	199,85	26180,50	14167,500	,089
	Other	242	180,04	43570,50		
Progressivism	Malatya	131	169,73	22234,50	13588,500	,022*
	Other	242	196,35	47516,50		
Reconstructionism	Malatya	131	180,89	23697,00	15051,000	,420
	Other	242	190,31	46054,00		
Existentialism	Malatya	131	179,79	23552,00	14906,000	,326
	Other	242	190,90	46199,00		

\* Significant difference (p<0.05)

As seen in Table 4, there were no significant differences between the mean educational philosophy orientation scores of pre-service teachers based on whether their place of residence was Malatya in perennialism (U=15670,500; p>0.05), essentialism (U=14167,500, p>0.05), reconstructionism (U =15051,000; p>0.05), and existentialism (U=14906,000; p>0.05) dimensions, while there was a significant difference in the progressivism dimension (U=13588,500; p<0.05). The comparison of the mean ranks demonstrated that the difference favored pre-service teachers whose place of residence was not Malatya. Thus, prospective teachers who attended a university outside their place of residence had a significantly higher tendency towards progressivism when compared to those who resided in Malatya.

Table 5. Kruskal-Wallis H-Test Results on educational philosophy orientations of pre-service teachers based on the type of their high school degree

Sub-Dimension	Type of High School	N	Mean Rank	S.D.	X <sup>2</sup>	P	Diff.
Perennialism	Numerical	50	171,81	2	3,784	,151	-
	Verbal	60	166,01	2			
	Equal Weight	259	191,95	2			
Fundamentalism	Numerical	50	196,38	2	2,199	,333	-
	Verbal	60	167,88	2			
	Equal Weight	259	186,77	2			
Progressivism	Numerical	50	145,24	2	8,229	,016*	EA-SAY
	Verbal	60	186,51	2			
	Equal Weight	259	192,33	2			
Reconstructionism	Numerical	50	176,55	2	,679	,712	-
	Verbal	60	193,27	2			
	Equal Weight	259	184,72	2			
Existentialism	Numerical	50	160,35	2	3,719	,156	-
	Verbal	60	180,93	2			
	Equal Weight	259	190,70	2			

\* Significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ )

As seen in Table-5, there were no significant differences between the mean educational philosophy orientation scores of pre-service teachers based on the type of their high school degree in perennialism ( $X^2_{(2)}=4,889$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), essentialism ( $X^2_{(2)}=4,889$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), reconstructionism ( $X^2_{(2)}=4,889$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ) and existentialism ( $X^2_{(2)}=4,889$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ) dimensions, while there was a significant difference in progressivism dimension ( $X^2_{(2)}=4,889$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). The multiple comparisons conducted with the Mann-Whitney U-test to determine the source of the significant difference revealed that the significant difference in the progressivism dimension favored those who graduated from equal weight high schools when compared to those who graduated from numerical high schools. In other words, the orientation of the pre-service teachers who graduated from equal weight high schools towards the progressive education philosophy was significantly higher when compared to that of the pre-service teachers who graduated from numerical high schools.



Table 6. Mann-Whitney U-Test results on educational philosophy orientations of pre-service teachers based on attendance in education philosophy course

Alt Boyut	Attendance	N	Mean Rank	Rotal Rank	U	P
Perennialism	Completed	259	175,57	45473,00	11803,000	,774
	Incomplete	93	179,09	16655,00		
Fundamentalism	Completed	259	169,18	43816,50	10146,500	,024*
	Incomplete	93	196,90	18311,50		
Progressivism	Completed	259	178,55	46244,50	11512,500	,527
	Incomplete	93	170,79	15883,50		
Reconstructionism	Completed	259	171,57	44436,00	10766,000	,128
	Incomplete	93	190,24	17692,00		
Existentialism	Completed	259	179,81	46571,00	11186,000	,293
	Incomplete	93	167,28	15557,00		

\* Significant difference (p<0.05)

As seen in Table 6, there were no significant differences between the mean educational philosophy orientation scores of pre-service teachers based on whether they took the educational philosophy course in perennialism (U=11803,000; p>0.05), progressivism (U=11512,500, p>0.05), reconstructionism (U=10766,000; p>0.05) and existentialism (U=11186,000; p>0.05) dimensions, while there was a significant difference in the essentialism dimension (U=10146,500; p<0.05). The comparison of mean ranks revealed that the difference favored of pre-service teachers who did not take the educational philosophy course. Thus, the orientation of the pre-service teachers who did not take the educational philosophy course towards essentialism was significantly higher when compared to the pre-service teachers who took this course.

Conclusion, Discussion and Recommendations

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

The main problem statement in the study aimed to determine the educational philosophy trends among preschool pre-service teachers. Based on the findings related to the problem statement, the study aimed to determine whether the educational philosophy trends among the preschool pre-service teachers were consistent with the educational philosophy adopted by the MNE preschool curriculum.

The ranking of the educational philosophy orientations of the preschool pre-service teachers revealed the following order: existentialism (X̄=4.62), progressivism (X̄=4.52), perennialism (X̄=3.99), reconstructionism (X̄=3). .87) and Essentialism (X̄=2.37). Thus, the highest number of participants adopted the existentialism education philosophy, and the lowest number of participants adopted essentialism. The mean rank of the

philosophical orientations of the participants revealed that their orientation was mostly towards contemporary educational philosophies and away from the conventional educational philosophies.

The present study findings were consistent with the reports by Altinkurt, Yılmaz and Oğuz (2012), Yılmaz and Tosun (2013), Alkın-Şahin, Tunca and Ulubey (2014) and Bayrak (2019) that investigated the educational philosophy orientations of pre-service teachers. Except for a report by Bayrak (2019), the ranking of educational philosophy orientations was exactly the same in all studies. In the study by Bayrak (2019), only the rankings of the reconstructionism and perennialism were different.

The study findings were different when compared to the findings reported by Doğanay and Sarı (2003) and Duman (2008). These studies reported that the highest number of participants were oriented towards experimentalism and realism, and the lowest number of participants were oriented towards idealism. Üstüner (2008) reported that teachers employed in Malatya province adopted perennialism and existentialism education philosophies the least. These differences could be due to different data collection instruments. Because the data collection instrument employed in the present study revealed similar findings in studies where the same instrument was employed. In a study where different findings were reported, Üstüner (2008) employed a self-developed scale, and others employed the Philosophical Preferences Evaluation Form, which was developed by Wiles and Bondi (1993) and adopted to Turkish language by Doğanay and Sarı (2003). The employment of different measurement tools may have led to the differences between the findings.

The comparison of the orientations of the preschool pre-service teachers based on certain variables demonstrated that the adoption of essentialism among the freshmen and sophomore pre-service teachers was significantly higher when compared to the seniors. In other words, the educational philosophy trends among the pre-service teachers with less seniority were more traditional when compared to senior pre-service teachers. As the seniority increased, conventional education philosophies became less popular.

The findings were consistent with the reports by Ekiz, (2005), Biçer, Er and Özel (2013), and Bayrak (2019). In all three studies, it was concluded that educational philosophy orientations of the pre-service teachers improved towards more contemporary approaches with seniority. Thus, it could be suggested that education faculties had a positive influence on the educational philosophy orientations of the pre-service teachers.

Attendance in the educational philosophy course was scrutinized as a variable since educational philosophies are introduced in this course to provide various perspectives for pre-service teachers. The analysis conducted in the present study revealed a significant difference between the orientations of the pre-service teachers who took the course and who did not. This difference favored those who did not take the course, demonstrating that they adopted conventional educational philosophies. It could be suggested that the educational philosophy course content led to a change in the educational philosophy orientations of the pre-service teachers towards contemporary approaches. The findings reported by Aslan (2014) were consistent with this idea, and significant differences were

reported between the perennialism and idealism scores of the pre-school teacher candidates before and after taking the educational philosophy course.

It was suggested that a change in social environment could affect the educational philosophy orientations due to the acquisition of different perspectives. Thus, the educational philosophy orientations of preschool pre-service teachers were analyzed based on whether they attended higher education in their hometown. The analysis revealed that the pre-service teachers who did not attend a college in their hometown were significantly more oriented towards progressivism when compared to the pre-service teachers who attended a college in their hometown. The analysis of the impact of the type of the high school of graduation on the current educational philosophy orientations of the pre-service teachers revealed that the orientation of the pre-service teachers who graduated from equal-weight type high schools towards progressivism was significantly higher when compared to the pre-service teachers who graduated from numerical branch high schools. In other words, equal-weight branch graduates adopted the contemporary educational philosophies more than numerical branch graduates. Bayrak (2019) reported similar findings and determined that the students who graduated from numerical high school branches mostly adopted the conventional essentialist educational beliefs.

In the study, it was determined that the educational philosophy orientations of the preschool pre-service teachers were consistent with the philosophy adopted by the MNE preschool curriculum and tended towards contemporary educational philosophies. Similar findings were reported in studies conducted on the educational philosophy orientations of teachers and pre-service teachers with the same data collection instrument, while those employed different data collection instruments reported different findings. The trends could be determined without the impact of the data collection tools in future qualitative studies that would be conducted by field experts. Furthermore, future qualitative studies could investigate whether the teachers reflected their educational philosophy orientations in educational practices. It was also determined that the educational philosophy course was effective on the approach of the orientations of the pre-service teachers towards contemporary educational philosophies. The weight of the educational philosophy course should be increased in teacher training programs, and the effects of other courses on the educational philosophy orientation of the pre-service teachers should be investigated in future studies.

It was determined that attending a college in a city different from their hometown had an effect on pre-service teachers' orientation towards contemporary educational philosophies. Pre-service teachers could be encouraged to study in different cities, and affirmative action policies could be adopted for pre-service teachers who study in their hometowns to participate in seminars, symposiums, courses and conferences and student exchange programs in other cities or countries. In addition, the pre-service teachers with less seniority oriented towards conventional educational philosophies could be considered a product of their previous educational experiences. Thus, the educational philosophy course could be included in high school curricula to improve the orientation towards contemporary educational philosophies in pre-college education levels, where the course content should be developed based on contemporary philosophies, and the conventional instructional methods should be abandoned.

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