



Investigating Preschool Teachers' Perceptions of Multicultural Competence *

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Abstract

Teachers are the most important actors in integrating a multicultural perspective into pre-school education. Identifying teachers' perceptions of multicultural competence will enable the development of possible interventions. The current research carried out for this purpose is to examine the level of multicultural competence perceptions of preschool teachers according to the variables of age, region which they born/raised, educational background, professional experience, cultural diversity of the city where they study, receiving multicultural education, and presence of children who from different cultures in their classroom. In the research, survey research design, which is one of the quantitative methods, was used. For examined the multicultural competence perceptions of 280 preschool teachers working in official institutions affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in Altındađ, ankaya, Etimesgut, Keiören, Mamak and Yenimahalle districts of Ankara in the 2019-2020 academic year, the "Perceptions of Multicultural Competence Scale" used that developed by Bařbay and Kađnıcı (2011). The obtained data was evaluated in the dimensions of awareness, knowledge, and skill, and it was revealed that preschool teachers' multicultural competence perceptions differed significantly according to their age, region which they born/raised, and educational backgrounds. The results were discussed within the framework of the determined variables and suggestions presented for future research.

Keywords

Cultural diversity
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Introduction

Education is a sociocultural process in which the individual includes his/her own experiences. Teachers, school administrators, and families are involved in this process as well as individuals receiving education. In this regard, the emergence of cultural diversity in the educational environment is normal. However, a school environment organized according to the norms of the dominant culture makes it difficult for different cultures to be in harmony (Banks et al., 2001; Gay, 2004, p. 199). From the

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moment they are born, children are socialized with the cultural values adopted by their environment. Therefore, they also carry the values shaping their behavioral and emotional reactions to the classroom environment. In a school environment where cultural diversity is ignored, the values of teachers, children, and families can conflict (Gay, 2000, p. 77; Trawick-Smith, 2014, p. 11). In that case, the creation of a school culture, which is not built on a single cultural model, where all children's identities are supported and where they feel belonging, is necessary for children's social and academic success (Banks, 2014; Ramsey, 2018, p. 10).

The necessity of creating a school culture in an inclusive and supportive way of different cultures has emerged with the spread of multicultural society awareness. In the broadest sense, multiculturalism has been created as the opposite of the understanding of "assimilation". Rather than the assimilation of various cultures in a country, environment, and environment in the dominant culture, it is based on accepting the existence of those cultures (Banks, 2006, p. 40). This is explained by the fact that it is also guaranteed and encouraged to create a space for different cultures to develop on their own as well as co-existence in the society. It is essential that these differences develop together and exist in harmony (Aydın, 2013, p. 3). In this regard, each one of the studies on multiculturalism from the local to the global level brings a new understanding. All these studies have integrated the concept of multiculturalism as the coexistence of people of different races, languages, ethnicity, gender, education, religion, disability, and other characteristics. These differences are explained by the beliefs and practices that people set up to understand themselves and the world and organize their social life (American Psychological Association [APA], 2003). Kymlicka (2012) drew attention to the historical context of multiculturalism and pointed out that this concept, based on as old as the history of humanity, has been kept alive for centuries in multinational states. The reason why multiculturalism is addressed in this way is the opportunity for different cultures to live together, especially with globalization and increasing migration between countries, and the spread of multicultural societies. This situation paves the way for many states to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy (Aydın, 2013, p. 7).

The adoption of the concept of multiculturalism brought about discussions in the field of education, too. The concept of multicultural education, which was first put forward by Horace Kallen in 1915, adopted the philosophy of defending pluralism in education and the necessity of arranging educational environments to include all individuals with different cultural characteristics (Aydın, 2013, p. 6; Banks, 2006, p. 41). Multicultural education is defined as the institutionalization of the philosophy of cultural pluralism based on the principles of mutual respect, acceptance and understanding, equality, and commitment to social justice. Multicultural education is an idea and reform movement that advocates the structural change of educational institutions, including values, rules, curriculum, management policies, organizational structure, and teaching materials. Therefore, it has been accepted as a sustainable process that requires effort and time investments in the long run (Gay, 1994). The Multicultural Education Commission (1977) considers multicultural education as a positive power of pluralistic society with an effort to present all cultures to students and explains it as a tool for understanding global society by gaining the basis of the concepts of social justice and human rights (as cited in Gay, 1994). According to Parekh (1996), multicultural education is an education without prejudice that supports children's ability to analyze different lifestyles, experiences, and ideas, and to sensitize children to different perspectives, and aims at raising individuals with the freedom to explore differences and cultures. Addressing all these definitions and contexts within the framework of four characteristics, Gorski (2009) reports the characteristics of multicultural education as (a) teacher's following an application process that supports different learning styles, (b) organizing the subject to be discussed in the application process by considering different cultures, (c) creating a critically inclusive environment where students can share their perspectives and experiences during their education, and (d) providing social responsibility and civic responsibility that will encourage student's participation in educational practices in line with social justice and democratic values.

Multicultural education requires designing a versatile and holistic process. Therefore, first of all, teachers and school administrators should respect the various cultural characteristics that each child is likely to bring to the school from their own context and create the entire school system on cultural diversity. It is expected that the classroom environment, the materials used, the school program, and the school personnel are developed and trained with a multicultural understanding (Banks, 2006, p. 205; Gay, 2000, p. 112). To provide the targeted educational environment, education programs should be created with multidisciplinary approaches to improve the self-esteem of children from different cultures, provide various cultural experiences, develop attitudes and behaviors that support diversity, and support different perspectives (Banks, 2006, p. 209; Hyde, 2006). For the development and applicability of multicultural education programs, teachers should have multicultural competencies. In this regard, teachers should be conscious of cultural competence, academic success, and socio-political awareness (Ladson-Billings, 1995, as cited in Abu-Ghazalah, 2017), should know the function of providing educational diversity and richness, should be competent and supportive of the processes of knowledge construction, should be knowledgeable about the lives of their students, and should have pedagogical knowledge and use it in educational planning (Banks, 2006, p. 241).

Multicultural education should take place in the education process as of the preschool period. With the Sociocultural Theory, Vygotsky (1978, p. 80) explains a cognitive development process in which the child is influenced by the culture he/she is in, and the knowledge is structured in the process of individual and social relations. Culture has a direct impact on the child's early development. Therefore, the effect of culture should not be ignored, and preschool teachers should create culturally responsive educational practices while supporting the child's personal and social skills in preschool education (Zakin, 2012).

Ongoing studies, developed approaches, and policies in the global area show the necessity of addressing multiculturalism in Turkey with the dimensions of society and education. Studies investigating cultural diversity in Turkey reveal that people from different ethnic origins live together, more than 15 mother tongues (primarily Kurdish, Arabic and Zazaki) are spoken apart from the official language (Turkish), and religions and sects vary according to regions (Aydın, 2013, p. 155; KONDA, 2006). In addition to this, being on the migration routes and being seen as a destination country increases migration due to the geopolitical position of Turkey. Increasing immigration rates, especially after the civil war started in Syria in 2011, have increased the cultural diversity of Turkey. According to the registered statistics for 2021, 32% of the 3.9 million refugees in Turkey are children (UNHCR, 2019), and all immigrant children in Turkey are protected by the right to basic education. Not ignoring the existing and increasing cultural diversity in the educational environment and realizing educational practices suitable for the multicultural education environment in the classroom will be possible with teachers with multicultural competencies (Cırık, 2008).

Studies in the field of multicultural education reveal that teachers' multicultural competencies differ according to variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, experience, cultural diversity of the environment in which they grew up, and educational levels. Gorham (2001) conducted a study on the multicultural competencies of primary school teachers and revealed that teachers with multicultural backgrounds were more ready to work with children from different cultures. Määttä (2008) conducted a study on the perceptions of multicultural competence of primary education teachers in Israel and determined that teachers who had the experience of working with immigrant children had higher proficiency. Çoban, Karaman, and Doğan (2010) conducted a study and reported that teacher candidates who grew up in a multicultural environment in a metropolitan city had a more positive perspective on cultural differences. Pavone (2011) investigated the effect of the multicultural education course, which was prepared within the framework of a 10-week period, on the perceptions of secondary school mathematics teachers and revealed that the teachers who participated in the education had a higher perception. Bulut (2015) conducted a study with the preschool teacher candidates (for master's thesis) and revealed that there was a positive correlation between the multicultural personalities of teachers and their multicultural education attitudes. Bekir and Bayraktar (2018) investigated the multicultural efficacy perceptions of preschool teacher candidates according to certain variables and revealed that there was a significant difference according to the variable of taking a course related to multiculturalism.

One of the most important purposes of preschool education, the first stage of education, is to raise awareness about the cultural context in which the child lives and the differences outside that context (Bulut, 2015). Therefore, it is expected that the awareness, knowledge, and skills of teachers, who plan the preschool education program and play a key role in acculturation of the child and in gaining awareness and respect for differences, are developed (Gay, 2000, p. 42). Investigation of the relevant literature and the need and necessity of developing studies on the importance of the role of preschool teachers in multicultural education form the basis of this study. It is seen that age and experience, the environment in which experiences are gained and the education received, and exposure to cultural diversity are affected by the perspective on multicultural education and the competencies acquired. For all these reasons, it is predicted that teachers' multicultural competencies will be differ according to the age, professional experience, educational background of the preschool teachers, cultural diversity of the regions and cities where they studied and where they were born or raised, any training they received on multiculturalism, the presence of children who from different cultures in their classrooms.

In this regard, this study aims at offering solutions to improve teachers' competencies by revealing the level of multicultural competence perceptions of preschool teachers and how they differ according to the variables determined. The following research question was searched for an answer in this study: "Do preschool teachers' perceptions of multicultural competence show a significant difference according to their age, educational background, years of professional experience, the region where they were born and raised, the cultural diversity of the cities where they studied, the status of receiving multicultural education, and the presence of children from different cultures in their classrooms?"

Method

Research Design

The research design of this study was a survey research design that is one of the quantitative methods. In survey research design, the opinions of the participants about an event or subject or descriptive qualities such as perception, skill, attitude, and interest are determined. It is generally carried out on larger samples compared to other studies (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012, p. 393). This study was based on the cross-sectional model emphasizing survey studies in which the sample was large, and the measurement was made at once (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2016, p. 179).

Population and Sample Group

The population of this study consisted of preschool teachers working in the official preschools and official kindergartens affiliated to the Ankara Province Directorate of National Education (Ankara DoNE), Turkey, in the 2019-2020 academic year. 2018-2019 Formal Education Statistics demonstrated that 3501 preschool teachers worked in official institutions affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in Ankara, Turkey (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2019). As the number of teachers in the specified statistics represented a universe that was difficult to reach, the sample group was narrowed down to the districts in which a multicultural environment was determined by considering the immigration status of the districts in Ankara. Considering the internal and external migration status of the districts (Ankara Development Agency, 2014) and the number of immigrants placed in Ankara within the scope of temporary protection on a district basis (Savran & Sat, 2019), the following districts of Ankara province were included in the study as convenience samples: Altındağ, Çankaya, Etimesgut, Keçiören, Mamak, and Yenimahalle.

It was determined that 2619 teachers worked in official institutions affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in the above-mentioned districts (Ankara İl Millî Eğitim Müdürlüğü, 2019). Considering the argument that the sample of the study should represent at least 10% of the population (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016, p. 97), it was aimed to reach at least 260 teachers. During the research process, in line with the ethics committee permission obtained from Hacettepe University Institute of Educational Sciences and the permissions of the MoNE, the official authorities and teachers of 46 preschools and 10 kindergartens in the 6 central districts were interviewed, forms were sent to 420

teachers volunteering to participate in the study, and a total of 266 measurement tools were received. As the end of the data collection process coincided with the pandemic period, an online form was created for 18 teachers who could not receive feedback by hand, and the responses provided to the online form were considered. In the analysis made after all the measurement tools were collected, it was determined that 4 forms were filled incompletely and were deemed invalid. At the end of the data collection process, 280 forms were clearly evaluated and analyzed.

Demographic information of the teachers included in the study was collected with the Teacher Personal Information Form and presented in the table.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Preschool Teachers

Variable	Categories	n	%
Gender	Female	277	98,9
	Male	3	1,1
	Total	280	100,0
Age	20 - 24 Years Old	11	3,9
	25 - 29 Years Old	63	22,5
	30 - 34 Years Old	53	18,9
	35 - 39 Years Old	73	26,1
	40 years old and above	80	28,6
	Total	280	100,0
Regions	Mediterranean Region	38	13,6
	Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia Regions	20	7,8
	Aegean Region	22	7,9
	Central Anatolia Region	144	51,4
	Black Sea Region	35	12,5
	Marmara Region	19	6,8
	Total	280	100,0
Educational Background	Associate Degree	7	2,5
	Bachelor's Degree	244	87,1
	Postgraduate	29	10,4
	Total	280	100,0
Professional Experience	1-5 years	35	12,5
	6-10 years	61	21,8
	11-15 years	86	30,7
	16-20 years	57	20,3
	21-25 years	17	6,1
	26 years and above	24	8,6
	Total	280	100,0

In addition to the information in Table 1, the teachers were asked about their mother tongue, how they would describe the cultural structure of the city they lived in, their multicultural education status, and whether they had children from different cultures in their classrooms. Ten of the 280 teachers who participated in this study reported that they had a different mother tongue other than Turkish (nArabic=4, nKurdish=3, nZazaki=2, nLaz=1). Considering the cultural diversity of the cities teachers studied in, it was determined that 73.2% of the teachers defined the cultural diversity of the city they received elementary education as monocultural while 26.8 % of the teachers defined it as multicultural, 62.1% of the teachers defined the cultural diversity of the city they received secondary education as monocultural while 37.9 % of the teachers defined it as multicultural, and 72.14% of the teachers defined the cultural diversity of the city they received graduate education as monocultural while 27.86 % of the teachers defined it as multicultural. Only 24 of the 280 preschool teachers included in the study reported that they received multicultural education, however, 23.6% (n=66) of the teachers also reported that there were children from different cultures in their classes.

Data Collection Tools

In this study, “Teacher Personal Information Form” and “Perceptions of Multicultural Competence Scale” were used as data collection tools.

The Teacher Personal Information Form used in this study was developed by the researcher. In the introduction part of the form, there was a Voluntary Participation Form. The Voluntary Participation Form introduced the researchers, explained the purpose and content of the study, and informed the participants that the study was carried out with the relevant permissions. The participants were also informed that participation was completely voluntary, and the information provided would be kept confidential. The Personal Information Form was used to obtain information about the teachers’ gender, age, mother tongue, educational background, professional experience, the region where the teachers were born and raised, the cultural diversity of the cities where they spent their primary, secondary, and graduate education years, the trainings they received on multiculturalism and what these trainings were, and whether there were children from different cultures in their classes. The relevant variables were determined by examining the studies in the literature. 5-year intervals were determined to obtain information about the ages and professional experience of teachers. In this way, categorized data were obtained from the teachers. Considering the variable of the region where the teachers were born and raised, 7 geographical regions were categorized and presented in the form. As there were two responses for the Southeastern Anatolia Region in the data obtained, expert opinion was sought, and it was decided to combine the Eastern Anatolia Region and Southeastern Anatolia Region categories.

The Perceptions of Multicultural Competence Scale was developed by Başbay and Kağnıcı (2011) to measure teachers’ multicultural competence perceptions. The scale was created with the dimensions of awareness, knowledge, and skill by considering the importance of designing the education and learning environments for students with different cultural characteristics, teachers’ knowing and being aware of their students’ cultural characteristics and being able to apply the necessary skills to transfer these cultural characteristics to the education process. The opinions and feedback were received from ten Educational Sciences and three Psychology experts when developing the scale. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficients calculated for the reliability of 41 items of the scale were 0.85 in the “awareness” dimension, 0.87 in the “knowledge” dimension, 0.91 in the “skill” dimension, and 0.95 for the whole scale. In line with these results, the scale was finalized with 3 dimensions and 41 items. Bulut and Başbay (2014) repeated the validity and reliability studies of the scale in their study. In the study conducted with 413 teachers working at primary, secondary, and high school levels, it was determined that confirmatory factor analyses fit indexes provided valid criteria and the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficients calculated for the reliability was 0.84 in the “Awareness” dimension, 0.83 in the “Knowledge” dimension, 0.84 in the “Skill” dimension, and 0.93 for the whole scale. In the scale, the awareness dimension consisted of 16 items, the knowledge dimension consisted of 9 items, and the skill dimension consisted of 16 items. The items of the scale were formed in the form of a 5-point Likert-type measurement form and finalized to include “strongly agree”, “agree”, “partially agree”, “disagree”, and “strongly disagree” statements of the participants. The lowest score to be obtained from the scale was 41 and the highest score to be obtained was 205. Considering the sub-dimensions of the scale, the lowest score in the awareness dimension was 16 while the highest score was 80, the lowest score in the knowledge dimension was 9 while the highest score was 45, and the lowest score in the skill and awareness dimensions was 16 while the highest score was 80. Approaching high scores indicates high multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skill perceptions (Başbay & Kağnıcı, 2011). The findings obtained from the validity and reliability studies provide evidence that the scale could be used to measure the multicultural competence perceptions of preschool teachers. During an interview, Başbay, one of the experts who developed the scale, reported that the scale could be applied to teachers from preschool level to high school level when he was asked whether the scale could be applied to the preschool teachers or not. Within the scope of this study, reliability analyzes were carried out for the sample group consisting of preschool teachers. Reliability values calculated with the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient were 0.82 for the “Awareness” dimension, 0.83 for the “Knowledge” dimension, 0.87 for the “Skill” dimension, and 0.92 for the whole

scale. A value of 0.70 and above for the reliability coefficient could be considered sufficient (Landis & Koch, 1977, as cited in Seçer, 2015, p. 30). Therefore, it was determined that the scale was suitable for measuring the multicultural competence perceptions of preschool teachers. Sample items related to the scale were presented in the Appendix.

Data Analysis

Considering the data obtained on the difference between teachers' multicultural competence perceptions (awareness, knowledge, skill, and total score dimensions), Independent sample t-Test and One-Way Analysis of Variance were used for the normally distributed variables (age, the region where the teachers were born and raised, professional experience, the cultural diversity of the cities where they studied, and whether there were children from different cultures in their classes) while Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests were used for the variables that were not normally distributed (educational status and multicultural education). The effect sizes of the analyzes were interpreted by considering the criteria of Cohen (1988). Cohen (1988) stated that there was no significant effect between 0-0.01, low effect size between 0.01-0.06, medium effect size between 0.06-0.14, and high effect size between 0.14-1 (as cited in Demir, 2019, p. .216). The coding and analysis of the data were carried out with the SPSS package program and the R statistical software program.

Results

Multicultural competence perceptions of preschool teachers were analyzed in terms of awareness, knowledge, skill, and total dimensions according to demographic variables and presented in tables.

Table 2. Investigation of Multicultural Competency Perception Scores of Preschool Teachers by One-Way Analysis of Variance by Age Group

Dimensions	Source of Variance	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	p*
Awareness	Between Groups	197,433	4	49,358	0,783	0,537
	Within Groups	17336,764	275	63,043		
	Total	17534,196	279			
Knowledge	Between Groups	190,043	4	47,511	1,563	0,184
	Within Groups	8358,525	275	30,395		
	Total	8548,568	279			
Skill	Between Groups	542,557	4	135,639	1,978	0,098
	Within Groups	18857,011	275	68,571		
	Total	19399,568	279			
Total	Between Groups	2172,149	4	543,037	1,540	0,191
	Within Groups	96978,248	275	352,648		
	Total	99150,396	279			

*p<0,05

One-Way Analysis of Variance was conducted to determine the differentiation of preschool teachers' multicultural competence perceptions according to the age variable. The results obtained demonstrated that there was no statistically significant difference between the awareness [F(4-275)=0,783, p>0,05, $\eta^2=0,01$], knowledge [F(4-275)=1,563, p>0,05, $\eta^2=0,02$], skill [F(4-275)=1,978, p>0,05, $\eta^2=0,02$], and total [F(4-275)=1,540, p>0,05, $\eta^2=0,02$] scores of teachers according to the age variable (Table 2). Effect size analyzes (η^2) demonstrated a low level of effect.

Table 3. Investigation of Multicultural Efficiency Perception Scores of Preschool Teachers by One-Way Analysis of Variance by Region in Which They Born/Raised

Factors	Source of Variance	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	p*	Significant Differences
Awareness	Between Groups	901,009	5	180,202	2,968	0,013	
	Within Groups	16638,187	274	60,705			
	Total	17534,196	279				
Knowledge	Between Groups	477,248	5	95,450	3,240	0,007	Central Anatolia-Mediterranean
	Within Groups	8071,320	274	29,457			
	Total	8548,568	279				
Skill	Between Groups	958,415	5	191,638	2,848	0,016	
	Within Groups	18441,153	274	67,303			
	Total	19399,568	279				
Total	Between Groups	6612,760	5	1322,552	3,916	0,002	Mediterranean-Central Anatolia East and Southeastern Anatolia-Central Anatolia
	Within Groups	92537,637	274	337,729			
	Total	99150,396	279				

*p<0,05

As seen in Table 3, there was a statistically significant difference between the awareness [$F(5-274)= 2,968$, $p=0,013<0,05$], knowledge [$F(5-274)= 3,240$, $p=0,007<0,05$], skill [$F(5-274)= 2,848$, $p=0,016<0,05$], and total [$F(5-274)=3,916$, $p=0,002<0,05$] scores of teachers according to the region where they were born and raised. As a result of the Tukey multiple comparison tests performed to determine the significant difference between the groups, there was a statistically significant difference between the knowledge dimension scores ($p=0,028<0,05$) of the teachers who were born and raised in the Mediterranean Region and the knowledge dimension scores of the teachers who were born and raised in the Central Anatolia Region. There was also a statistically significant difference between the total scores of the teachers who were born and raised in the Mediterranean Region and the Central Anatolia Region ($p=0,025<0,05$) and the total scores of the teachers who were born and raised in the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia Regions ($p=0,042$). When the effect sizes were analyzed, a low total score ($\eta^2=0,06$) and a moderate effect were determined in awareness ($\eta^2=0,05$), knowledge ($\eta^2=0,05$), and skill ($\eta^2=0,04$) scores.

The effect of educational status on preschool teachers' multicultural competence perceptions was analyzed with the Kruskal-Wallis H test as this variable did not show a normal distribution. Paired comparisons of the variables were examined with the Mann-Whitney U test and were presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Paired Comparison of Preschool Teachers' Multicultural Competence Perceptions Awareness, Knowledge, Skill, and Total Scores by Educational Backgrounds

Factors	Groups	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p*
Awareness	Associate Degree	251	123,57	865,00	837,00	0,928
	Bachelor's Degree		126,07	30761,00		
	Associate Degree	36	13,86	97,00	69,00	0,193
	Postgraduate		19,62	569,00		
	Bachelor's Degree	273	132,72	32383,00	2493,00	0,009*
	Postgraduate		173,03	5018,00		
Knowledge	Associate Degree	251	177,29	1241,00	495,00	0,057
	Bachelor's Degree		124,53	30385,00		
	Associate Degree	36	20,57	144,00	87,00	0,560
	Postgraduate		18,00	522,00		
	Bachelor's Degree	273	133,18	32495,50	2605,50	0,020*
	Postgraduate		169,16	4905,50		
Skill	Associate Degree	251	147,93	1035,50	700,50	0,417
	Bachelor's Degree		125,37	30590,50		
	Associate Degree	36	15,57	109,00	81,00	0,412
	Postgraduate		19,21	557,00		
	Bachelor's Degree	273	132,89	32495,50	2534,50	0,012*
	Postgraduate		171,60	4905,50		
Total	Associate Degree	251	148,50	1039,50	696,50	0,405
	Bachelor's Degree		125,35	30586,50		
	Associate Degree	36	14,86	104,00	76,00	0,308
	Postgraduate		19,38	562,00		
	Bachelor's Degree	273	132,15	32245,50	2355,50	0,003*
	Postgraduate		171,78	5155,50		

*p<0,05

Paired comparisons demonstrated that there was a statistically significant difference between the awareness [U=2493, p=0,009<0,05, $\eta^2=0,16$], knowledge [U=2605,50, p=0,020<0,05, $\eta^2=0,26$], skill [U=2534,50, p=0,012<0,05, $\eta^2=0,16$], and total [U=2355,50, p=0,003<0,05, $\eta^2=0,3$] scores of teachers who received graduate and undergraduate education and the effect level was high.

One-Way Analysis of Variance was conducted to analyze the effect of preschool teachers' professional experience on their perceptions of multicultural competence.

Table 5. Investigation of Multicultural Efficiency Perception Scores of Preschool Teachers by One-Way Analysis of Variance by Professional Experience

Factors	Source of Variance	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	p*
Awareness	Between Groups	250,684	5	50,137	0,795	0,554
	Within Groups	17283,512	274	63,079		
	Total	17534,196	279			
Knowledge	Between Groups	160,697	5	32,139	1,050	0,389
	Within Groups	8387,871	274	30,613		
	Total	8548,568	279			
Skill	Between Groups	188,979	5	37,796	0,539	0,747
	Within Groups	19210,588	274	70,112		
	Total	19399,568	279			
Total	Between Groups	1381,480	5	276,296	0,774	0,569
	Within Groups	97768,917	274	356,821		
	Total	99150,396	279			

*p<0,05

The results obtained demonstrated that there was no statistically significant difference between the awareness [$F(5-274)= 0,795, p=0,554>0,05, \eta^2=0,01$], knowledge [$F(5-274)= 1,050, p=0,389>0,05, \eta^2=0,01$], skill [$F(5-274)= 0,539, p=0,747>0,05, \eta^2=0,09$], and total [$F(5-274)=0,774, p=0,569>0,05, \eta^2=0,01$] scores of teachers according to the professional experience variable (Table 5). When the effect sizes were examined, a low effect was determined in awareness, knowledge, and total scores while there was no significant effect in the skill dimension. As a result of the Tukey multiple comparison test, no double significance was determined.

Table 6. Investigation of Multicultural Efficiency Perception Scores of Preschool Teachers by T-Test by Cultural Diversity of the Cities Where Received Their Education

Factors	Groups	n	\bar{x}	S	df	t	p*	
Primary Education	Awareness	Monoculture	205	66,9951	7,54496	278	-0,204	0,839
		Multicultural	75	67,2133	8,94320			
	Knowledge	Monoculture	205	32,3220	5,31219	278	-1,446	0,149
		Multicultural	75	33,4000	6,07164			
	Skill	Monoculture	205	61,8585	7,99231	278	-1,432	0,153
		Multicultural	75	63,4667	9,17301			
	Total	Monoculture	205	161,17561	18,175031	278	-1,142	0,254
		Multicultural	75	164,08000	20,566149			
Secondary Education	Awareness	Monoculture	174	66,7586	7,60281	278	-0,797	0,426
		Multicultural	106	67,5377	8,44836			
	Knowledge	Monoculture	174	32,1897	5,24252	278	-1,636	0,103
		Multicultural	106	33,3019	5,94606			
	Skill	Monoculture	174	61,7816	7,77267	278	-1,307	0,192
		Multicultural	106	63,1226	9,17004			
	Total	Monoculture	174	160,72989	17,814767	278	-1,394	0,164
		Multicultural	106	163,96226	20,367539			
Graduate	Awareness	Monoculture	78	66,8205	6,93709	278	-0,305	0,760
		Multicultural	202	67,1436	8,29279			
	Knowledge	Monoculture	78	32,2051	5,42567	278	-0,761	0,447
		Multicultural	202	32,7673	5,58252			
	Skill	Monoculture	78	61,8333	6,93460	278	-0,568	0,571
		Multicultural	202	62,4653	8,83071			
	Total	Monoculture	78	160,85897	16,511880	278	-0,603	0,547
		Multicultural	202	162,37624	19,702691			

*p<0,05

The effect of the cultural diversity of the cities where the preschool teachers received their education on the perceptions of multicultural competence was analyzed with the t-Test for independent samples. It was determined that there was no statistically significant difference between the multicultural awareness [$t(278) = -0,204, p = 0,839 > 0,05, \eta^2 = 0,0$], knowledge [$t(278) = -1,446, p = 0,149 > 0,05, \eta^2 = 0,0$], skill [$t(278) = -1,432, p = 0,153 > 0,05, \eta^2 = 0,0$], and total [$t(278) = -1,142, p = 0,254 > 0,05, \eta^2 = 0,0$] scores of the teachers and the cultural diversity of the city where they received primary education, between the multicultural awareness [$t(278) = -0,797, p = 0,426 > 0,05, \eta^2 = 0,0$], knowledge [$t(278) = -1,636, p = 0,103 > 0,05, \eta^2 = 0,0$], skill [$t(278) = -1,307, p = 0,192 > 0,05, \eta^2 = 0,0$], and total [$t(278) = -1,394, p = 0,164 > 0,05, \eta^2 = 0,0$] scores of the teachers and the cultural diversity of the city where they received secondary education, and between the multicultural awareness [$t(278) = -0,305, p = 0,760 > 0,05, \eta^2 = 0,0$], knowledge [$t(278) = -0,761, p = 0,447 > 0,05, \eta^2 = 0,0$], skill [$t(278) = -0,568, p = 0,571 > 0,05, \eta^2 = 0,0$], and total [$t(278) = -0,603, p = 0,547 > 0,05, \eta^2 = 0,0$] scores of the teachers and the cultural diversity of the city where they received graduate education (Table 6). The effect sizes were not significant in any dimension.

As the experiences of the teachers participating in this study on multicultural education would affect their perception of multicultural competence, the cases of receiving multicultural education and having children in their classrooms with different cultural characteristics were also regarded as variables. The results obtained were presented in Table 7 and Table 8.

Table 7. Investigation of Multicultural Efficiency Perception Scores of Preschool Teachers by Status of Received Multicultural Education

Factors	Groups	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p*
Awareness	Received	24	130,71	3137,00	2837,000	0,535
	Not Received	256	141,42	36203,00		
Knowledge	Received	24	158,81	3811,00	2632,500	0,246
	Not Received	256	138,78	35528,50		
Beceri	Received	24	155,25	3726,00	2718,000	0,350
	Not Received	256	139,12	35614,00		
Skill	Received	24	148,06	3553,50	2890,500	0,632
	Not Received	256	139,79	35786,50		

* $p < 0,05$

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test applied demonstrated that teachers' multicultural competence perceptions, knowledge, skill, and mean rank averages of total scores were higher for teachers who received education; however, these results did not reveal a statistically significant difference [$U = 2837, p_{\text{awareness}} = 0,535 > 0,05, \eta^2 = 0,03; U = 2632,50, p_{\text{knowledge}} = 0,246 > 0,05, \eta^2 = 0,05; U = 2718, p_{\text{skill}} = 0,350 > 0,05, \eta^2 = 0,05; U = 2890,50, p_{\text{total}} = 0,632 > 0,05, \eta^2 = 0,02$]. In the current sample, it can be interpreted that the multicultural education received by the teachers did not make a statistically significant difference in the multicultural competence perceptions of teachers. The effect sizes demonstrated that there was a low level of effect.

Table 8. Investigation of Multicultural Efficiency Perception Scores of Preschool Teachers by Status of Existence Children from Different Cultures

Factors	Groups	n	\bar{x}	S	df	t	p*
Awareness	Yes	66	66,2576	8,06190	278	-0,933	0,352
	No	214	67,2991	7,88856			
Knowledge	Yes	66	31,9848	6,20792	278	-1,051	0,294
	No	214	32,8037	5,31176			
Skill	Yes	66	60,8485	9,01834	278	-1,610	0,108
	No	214	62,7336	8,08808			
Total	Yes	66	159,09091	20,752555	278	-1,414	
	No	214	162,83645	18,186472			

*p<0,05

The t-Test results presented in Table 8 revealed that teachers who had children from different cultures in their classes had higher awareness, knowledge, skill, and total average scores. In addition to this, it was determined that there was no significant difference and no significant effect between the awareness [t (278) = -0,933, p = 0,352 > 0,05, $\eta^2 = 0,0$], knowledge [t (278) = -1,051, p = 0,294 > 0,05, $\eta^2 = 0,0$], skill [t (278) = -1,610, p = 0,108 > 0,05, $\eta^2 = 0,0$], and total [t (278) = -1,414, p = 0,159 > 0,05, $\eta^2 = 0,0$] scores of the teachers and presence of children from different cultures in their classes.

Conclusion, Discussion, and Suggestions

During the research process, preschool teachers' perceptions of multicultural competence were analyzed within the framework of different variables, and a significant difference was determined in the variables of educational status and the region where the teachers were born/raised.

The data obtained regarding the age variable demonstrated that there was no significant difference between age groups regarding multicultural competence perceptions. When similar studies were examined, it was seen that age did not make a significant difference in terms of competencies and attitudes towards multiculturalism in parallel with this specific study (Bekir & Bayraktar, 2018; Gorham, 2001; Määttä, 2008; Polat, 2012).

When the scores of preschool teachers' multicultural competence perceptions were analyzed in terms of the region where they were born/raised, it was determined that the scores of the teachers born/raised in the Mediterranean Region were significantly higher than the teachers born/raised in the Central Anatolia Region. Considering the total score dimension, the scores of the teachers born/raised in the Mediterranean and the Eastern/Southeastern Anatolia Regions were significantly higher than the teachers born/raised in the Central Anatolia Region. Statistical studies demonstrate that the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia Regions are the regions with the highest linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity (KONDA, 2006). Therefore, it can be predicted that the difference in the multicultural competence perceptions of the teachers who are raised in these regions is due to the fact that they live and study in a multicultural environment. The Mediterranean Region is one of the regions with the highest immigration density (especially in metropolitan cities such as Antalya) (TÜİK, 2019). It can be interpreted that the intensity of immigration has increased the cultural diversity of the Mediterranean Region and this situation has also improved the perspectives of teachers towards multiculturalism. In a similar study, Titrek, Önder, and Karşlı (2009) analyzed teacher candidates' views on multicultural education according to the regions where they spent most of their lives and found that teacher candidates residing/living in the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia Regions approached multicultural education more positively compared to the teacher candidates residing/living in the Aegean and Black Sea Regions. In another study conducted with teachers, similar results were obtained. Bulut (2014) reported that teachers' perceptions of multicultural efficacy differed according to the place of residence where they spend most of their lives. Bulut (2015) also reported that the place where preschool teachers and teacher candidates lived affected their attitudes towards multicultural education, but the place where they were born and raised had no effect on their attitudes. In relation to these findings, no significant difference was observed in the multicultural competence perceptions of racially diverse primary school teachers (Gorham, 2001).

Considering the differences in the educational status of preschool teachers within the scope of this study, it was determined that the scores of teachers with graduate education in all sub-dimensions were at an acceptable level compared to teachers with undergraduate education. Studies dealing with the variable of educational status revealed that teachers' multicultural competence perceptions did not differ according to their educational status (Siviş, 2019). The number of studies including the relevant variable is quite limited; however, obtaining different results reveals that studies on the content of the education rather than the education level can yield clearer results. In addition to this, the fact that the number of teachers with associate and graduate educational status is only 13% of all teachers demonstrates the limitedness of the results regarding the educational status variable.

The results revealed that teachers' perceptions of multicultural competence did not differ according to years of professional experience. In studies with similar results, it was determined that multicultural competence perceptions and classroom practices of preschool teachers and teachers working at different grade levels (Määttä, 2008; Siviş, 2019; Yıldırım & Muyo Yıldırım, 2019) did not make any significant difference. Unlike the current study, Bulut (2014) and Durşen Ünal (2018) reported that the average score of multicultural competence perceptions decreased with the increase in professional experience and İsmetoğlu (2017) concluded that the multicultural competence perceptions of teachers with professional experience in the range of 1-5 years were significantly higher.

Considering the variable of the city where the preschool teachers studied, the participating teachers were asked to describe the city where they received primary, secondary, and university education as monocultural and multicultural. The results demonstrated that the majority of teachers (72,14%) defined their university life as multicultural, suggesting that it would be easier to adopt multiculturalism during university education. However, the results of the study demonstrated that the multicultural competence perceptions of the teachers did not have a significant difference according to the cultural diversity of the city where they lived. It is seen that studies reveal different results. Bulut (2015) reported that preschool teachers and teacher candidates did not have a significant effect on the attitudes of the city where they studied university and revealed that the multicultural education attitude scores of the university students in Ağrı province were higher than those in Kilis and Kütahya provinces. In a different study that can be associated with the current variable, Bekir and Bayraktar (2018) reported that the preschool teacher candidates' having friends from different cultures did not affect their multicultural competence perceptions.

Another variable that was considered within the scope of the study was the status of teachers receiving education on multiculturalism. Studies demonstrated that teachers teaching in multicultural classrooms were willing to design and develop multicultural educational content (Sheets & Chew, 2000) and that they could interpret and implement multicultural education according to their classrooms when they were supported appropriately (Fong & Sheets, 2004). Considering the variable of receiving education about multiculturalism, it was determined that the mean rank of the knowledge, skill, and total scores of the teachers who received education about multiculturalism was higher, but there was no statistically significant difference between the scores. Related studies revealed that there was a positive change in the beliefs, attitudes, and discourses of teacher candidates who received multicultural education courses (Valentin, 2006). A study conducted by Bekir and Bayraktar (2018) on this issue in Turkey revealed that preschool teacher candidates who received education on multiculturalism significantly affected their multicultural competencies. Developing the competencies of teachers in different fields is related to the training to be provided. The lifelong learning needs of teachers for the new situations they encounter are attempted to be supported by in-service training processes in Turkey; however, in-service training seems to be insufficient to support the needs of teachers in this regard (Hacettepe University Faculty of Education, 2017). One of the most important factors in the fact that the perceptions of the efficacy of teachers who reported that they received education on multiculturalism were not significantly different was the inadequacy of in-service training in terms of content.

The presence of children from different cultures in the classroom, as well as the variable of receiving education on multiculturalism, is seen as a factor that will provide teachers with a perspective on improving their competencies. The current study results demonstrated that the presence of children from different cultures in teachers' classrooms did not have a statistically significant difference in their multicultural competence perceptions. Contrary to this study, related studies revealed that teachers who had educational experience with immigrant children felt more competent about multiculturalism (Määttä, 2008) and emphasized the importance of experience (Fong & Sheets, 2004). In a study conducted by Hong, Troutman, Hartzell, and Kyles (2010) with teacher candidates to determine the factors affecting multicultural efficacy perceptions, it was determined that personal experiences played a decisive role in efficacy perceptions. It was also determined that the skills and awareness of teacher candidates who had experience in environments with racial diversity were higher.

One of the most important reasons why multicultural education is on the agenda in Turkey is the increasing immigration rates in recent years. Particularly, the intensive migration that started during the Syrian civil war, which has been going on since 2011, and the efforts to support the education rights of immigrants have increased the importance of teachers' having knowledge about multicultural education. As of 2021, the schooling rate of students under temporary protection in the institutions of the Ministry of National Education, Turkey, has increased to 64.68% (MoNE, 2021). On the other hand, the difficulties encountered in the education process of immigrant children are that the classroom adjustment processes of children who have access to education are difficult and take a long time, teachers feel inadequate in the education of children from different cultures, and teachers need support (Aykırı, 2017; Kardeş & Akman, 2018). All these processes and studies demonstrate that the education of immigrant children will be on our agenda in the next period and that every policy to be developed should be created with a multicultural educational environment and social environment in mind. In this regard, multicultural education regulations and policies to be developed should be handled on the axis of teachers, programs, and schools, which are the most important components of education, and teachers should be trained on the adopted policy. Especially policymakers need to establish a basis for multicultural education in which the wide cultural spectrum of Turkey is accepted, and cultural characteristics are transferred to the educational environment.

The results of this study provide resources on the development of preschool teachers' multicultural competence perceptions and the studies that can be conducted in this regard. Different from the related variables, it is suggested in the studies conducted that teachers and teacher candidates have a positive attitude toward multicultural education and consider it a right. It was determined that teachers who had a negative attitude toward multicultural education had concerns that the education to be applied could be a discriminating factor (Ünlü & Örten, 2013). In a study conducted by Taştekin et al. (2016), it was reported that preschool teachers had a positive attitude and perception toward multiculturalism, but they were insufficient to put it into practice. In this case, it is important to convey information about multiculturalism and educational studies to be developed in the context of multiculturalism to teachers with appropriate approaches and programs, and practical studies should be planned. Providing teacher training for multiculturalism starting from the undergraduate level will enable the development of multicultural competence perceptions and practices of teacher candidates. In a study conducted by Damgacı and Aydın (2013) with academicians working in the education faculties of universities in Istanbul, Turkey, it was revealed that the multicultural education attitudes of the academicians were at a very high level. Collaboration with academics should be made in the development of training for multiculturalism. Comparative analysis of the programs developed in countries that have adopted and implemented multicultural education approaches is one of the first steps to be taken. Arsal (2015) investigated the teacher training programs of two universities in Turkey and the USA and conducted interviews with the lecturers who taught in the programs related to early childhood education. The results revealed that there were differences related to multicultural education in the aims, content, teaching process, and assessment methods of teacher training programs and that the methods used by teacher educators in the USA were multicultural compared to their Turkish counterparts. Similar studies will serve as pioneers in shaping teacher education with a multicultural approach. It was determined that the development of multicultural competencies had multifaceted

effects such as teachers' personality traits, cultural intelligence, and school climate as well as educational processes. While Durşen Ünal (2018) determined that the multicultural personality traits of classroom teachers increased with the increase in their perception of multicultural competence, Yaşar-Ekici (2017) reported that there was a significant relationship between the cultural intelligence levels of preschool teachers and their attitudes towards multicultural education. In a study conducted by Karadağ (2015) to investigate the relationship between school administrators' multicultural competencies and school climate, it was determined that multicultural competencies had a positive relationship with positive administrator and teacher behaviors. In another study, it was revealed that the presence of refugee children in teachers' classrooms positively affected their general attitudes towards refugee children (Sağlam & Kanbur, 2017). It is very important to develop environments where multicultural competencies and cultural diversity are considered as it affects the general attitudes and behaviors of preschool teachers.

The preschool period is a critical period for children to gain awareness of cultural diversity and to gain a tolerance-based perspective on childhood. The MoNE (2013) Preschool Education Curriculum, which was created based on this, includes learning outcomes in presenting the differences to the children and improving their cultural awareness. It is important for preschool teachers to have multicultural competencies in achieving the learning outcomes of the curriculum and raising children's awareness of multiculturalism. Therefore, the following recommendations were made for teacher candidates and teachers, policymakers and the MoNE, and researchers. It was recommended for teacher candidates and teachers to (I) support preschool teachers' ability to see and interpret the cultural diversity of the society they live in starting from the lessons in teacher training programs, (II) inform teachers in a way that supports their multicultural competence perceptions within the scope of in-service training, and (III) plan the current in-service training programs according to the needs of teachers in terms of content. It was recommended for policy makers and the MoNE to (I) develop education policies by considering the ethnic structure of Turkey and (II) present the studies carried out to the Ministry of National Education and include informative studies throughout the country with the multicultural education commissions to be formed.

Considering the sustainability of this study, it is recommended for the researchers to (I) carry out large-scale case and intervention studies on multicultural education and teacher competencies, (II) concentrate on supporting teacher competencies by conducting studies on topics such as multicultural education practices, family education, and evaluation processes, (III) carry out interdisciplinary studies including professionals working in different fields such as psychologists, philosophers, sociologists, and social workers in the field of multicultural education, and (IV) conduct studies in a mixed research design by expanding the number of examples.

In this study, preschool teachers' multicultural competence perceptions were acceptable (n=280), but it was attempted to be revealed with a limited sample group. This is the most important limitation of this study. The use of a single measurement tool in data collection and the lack of data diversity can be considered seen as another limitation. These limitations point to the weaknesses of this study. The validity and reliability studies carried out when determining the measurement tool used in this study were carefully examined. Internal validity problems were attempted to be minimized by obtaining detailed information about the use from the researchers who developed the scale. It was assumed that the teachers who participated in this study voluntarily filled the measurement tool in an impartial and reflective manner. The results revealed the necessity of an in-depth investigation of preschool teachers' multicultural competence perceptions. As mentioned in the recommendations, more extensive and mixed-pattern studies are needed.

The research process was initiated with the permission of the ethics committee of Hacettepe University Institute of Educational Sciences and the permission of the Ministry of National Education, Turkey. The preschools and kindergartens in the central districts of Ankara province included in the sample group were informed by sending research permission letters by the Provincial Directorate of National Education. A consent form containing the documents demonstrating that the necessary permissions have been obtained was prepared for the teachers who wanted to participate in this study and the data were collected from voluntarily participating teachers. In this way, ethical problems were avoided.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. The Perceptions of Multicultural Competence Scale

Sample Items*	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3 I take care to create the learning and teaching process in a structure that includes different cultures.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 I prevent the emergence of cultural differences in classroom discussions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14 I seek ulterior motives under the idea of keeping alive different cultures.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20 I believe that diversity in values, beliefs, or lifestyles is a complementary part of being human.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29 I know about the cultural characteristics of my students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
36 I know about my cultural background.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

* The sample items presented in the Appendix are the sample items in the article titled " Perceptions of Multicultural Competence Scale: A Scale Development Study" published by Başbay and Kağnıcı (2011).

*The items were translated to provide an example. The translation was made by the author.