

# EVALUATING INCLUSIVITY IN THE PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM IN TURKEY: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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## **Abstract**

The Turkish population has a structure that encompasses different origins, races, and religious beliefs. This structure has expanded to a broader spectrum with immigrants and refugees coming to the country for various reasons. This diversity that constitutes society is also observed in early childhood education, which is the first level of education. In this context, starting from preschool education and developing an inclusive curriculum that caters to the diversity of students is highly important in terms of reducing discrimination, increasing inclusivity, and providing suitable learning environments for students' educational needs. The purpose of this study is to determine the nature of the preschool curriculum from an inclusive education perspective. Through the document analysis method, the present qualitative study addressed the preschool curriculum updated and published in 2013 by the Turkish Ministry of National Education. While the objectives and descriptions in the curriculum were examined through content analysis, the learning outcomes were examined using a rubric. It was determined that only one of the objectives in the preschool curriculum was related to inclusive education. Of the 63 learning outcomes examined, 29 were completely unrelated to inclusive education, 21 had very little relevance, 7 had moderate relevance, and 6 had high relevance. As a result, it was determined that while the inclusive education approach was considered and adopted in the general objectives and descriptions of the preschool curriculum, there was no emphasis on children with refugee, asylum seeker, immigrant, or similar status, and there were shortcomings in the evaluation dimension of the instruction process.

**Keywords:** curriculum, early childhood education, inclusive education

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## **Introduction**

The idea of inclusive education was first introduced and approved at the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca Statement, which is considered the most important international document to have emerged in the field of special education to date, emphasizes that regular schools with an inclusive approach are "the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes,

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building an inclusive society, and achieving education for all” (UNESCO, 1994). This statement, issued by the United Nations, aims to strengthen education for all children, especially those in need of special education, and is grounded on the principles of “Inclusive Education” and “Education for All” (Dede, 1996).

Inclusiveness in education is one of the concepts that has been emphasized in education policies in recent years. The concept of “Inclusive education” was initially used for the adaptation of students with special needs to normal classrooms, but in recent years, it has been used in a broader sense to emphasize student diversity in schools, including increased cultural and linguistic diversity (Ainscow, 2005; Pantić, Closs, & Ivošević, 2011). In addition to emphasizing student diversity, inclusive education also has the meaning of attempting to meet the educational needs and deficiencies of children with refugee, asylum seeker, migrant, or similar statuses (Nuth, 2018). It is also assumed that the aim of inclusive education is to eliminate social exclusion resulting from attitudes and reactions towards diversity in race, social class, ethnic origin, religion, gender, and abilities (Vitello & Mithaug, 1998; as cited in Ainscow & César, 2006). This study considers inclusive education as an educational approach that aims to equally include all children with different characteristics, such as refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, people with disabilities, minorities, those with religious, gender, cultural, language, and racial differences, and patients (e.g., leukemia, hepatitis, and AIDS), in the education system and to provide the necessary conditions for these students to receive education with their peers without being discriminated against by their peers.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2009) states that inclusive education focuses on three fundamental areas. The first of these key areas, “*Inclusive System*”, emphasizes the need for education systems, schools, and teachers to respect individual, social, and cultural diversity and to meet the expectations and needs of children accordingly. In this context, this study attempts to examine and find out how the preschool curriculum within education systems is inclusive. The second key area, “*Inclusive Access to Education*,” means that everyone should have equal rights to access quality education. The third fundamental area, “*Social Inclusion*,” emphasizes collaboration between stakeholders. According to social inclusion, institutions need to work in coordination with each other to meet the expectations of social policies, social actors, and stakeholders.

Like UNESCO’s (2009) three areas of inclusion, Ainscow (2005) also states that four elements are necessary to ensure inclusion. First, inclusion is a process and an ongoing quest for better ways of responding to differences and diversities. As the second element, inclusion is related to identifying and removing barriers. It involves collecting, analyzing, and evaluating data from different sources to plan education-related policies and regulations in practice. Third, inclusion is related to the presence, participation, and achievement of all students in education. Here, “presence” refers to where children are educated plus when and how reliably they receive education. “Participation” refers to the quality of their experiences in the school environment. However, “achievement” refers not only to test or exam results but also to the outcomes of learning in the overall curriculum. The fourth element, inclusion involves a special emphasis on student groups that may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion, or low achievement. This element involves more careful monitoring of the groups that are statistically at the highest risk and, when necessary, their presence, participation, and achievement in the education system.

Considering the literature, numerous scientific studies have been conducted to ensure inclusivity in education. Studies conducted to determine the factors that influence the development of inclusive education systems have emphasized the need for collaboration among schools, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders for inclusive education (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Ainscow, Muijs, & West, 2006; Ainscow, 2005). They have also highlighted the importance of leadership roles in fulfilling organizational

conditions and promoting inclusive cultures and have attempted to identify applicable strategies. In addition, studies examining teacher opinions on inclusive education have emphasized the importance of teacher characteristics as the implementer of the curriculum (Bailey, Nomanbhoy, & Tubpun, 2014; Boyle, Tooping, & Snape, 2013; Chhetri, Spina, & Carrington, 2020; Hay, Smit, & Paulsen, 2001; Saloviita, 2018). These studies determined that the congruence of teacher opinions with inclusive education policies led to successful outcomes in practice and that teachers had positive attitudes towards inclusive education and considered themselves competent, but still needed assistance in this regard. Additionally, there is a study that emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive, inclusive, comfortable, and democratic classroom environment that gives children a sense of belonging for inclusive education (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009).

When studies on the reflections of inclusive education in the curriculum in Turkey are examined, it is seen that there are limited research studies. One of these studies examines the basic education curriculum. Şimşek, Dağistan, Şahin, Koçyiğit, Dağistan Yalçinkaya, Kart, and Dağdelen (2019) examined the basic education curriculum (grades 1–8) in use from a multicultural perspective and found that the learning outcomes included in these programs barely reflect inclusive education. Furthermore, Şayan (2020) examined the opinions of preschool teachers on inclusive education and concluded that inclusive education practices are internalized by teachers and that inclusive education is a necessary educational approach for all students in our education system. Gürkan and Koran (2014), who examined the participation rights of children in the preschool curriculum, determined that only a few learning outcomes in the curriculum were related to participation rights.

Pamuk and Bal (2019) examined teachers' views on inclusive education and language development in adaptations made during the preschool period and determined that teachers believed that inclusive education was necessary but had difficulty relating inclusive education to language development and needed training on practical applications of inclusive education. Gültekin Talayhan, and Sakız (2022) examined the theoretical framework, units, and topics, learning outcomes and objectives, teaching methods and techniques, and measurement and evaluation approaches of the English language curriculum taught in grade 5 classes in middle schools in Turkey based on the principles of inclusive education. As a result, they found that the theoretical framework section of the curriculum, the units, and topics were generally aligned with the principles of inclusive education. However, they found that individual needs and learning pace differences were not adequately considered in terms of learning outcomes, objectives, and the given assignments.

Besides process-oriented assessment techniques and self-assessment, the curriculum indicated that formal assessments should also be conducted to document student achievement through written and oral exams, quizzes, assignments, and projects, which complies with the principles of inclusive education. In another study, Plabıyık and Sakız (2021) examined the English language curriculum taught in Turkey from an inclusive education perspective and suggested enhancing the inclusivity of the curriculum. Unlike these studies, the present study aims to determine the extent to which the outcomes of the preschool curriculum reflect inclusive education. The nature of inclusive education will be examined in the preschool curriculum as a small section alongside the big picture.

### **Practices Related to Inclusive Education in Turkey**

Besides the scientific studies conducted on inclusive education in Turkey, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has also carried out some studies. In Kaya's (2019) study conducted to determine the inclusive education policies of the MoNE, the outcomes of government programs, development plans, strategic plans, decisions of the

National Education Council, legal provisions, MoNE administrative activity reports, MoNE budget presentation texts, and Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) projects were examined, and the following results were obtained: In recent years, a paradigm shift towards integration and inclusive education has been aimed at in development plans instead of special education. However, this goal has not been reflected in the government's program. A similar paradigm shift can also be seen in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> National Education Council decisions. Although MoNE's strategic plans include goals related to special education, integration, and inclusion, the emphasis on the expansion of special education schools indicates that inclusive education is not the priority. As a result, Kaya's (2019) analyses revealed that the policies of the MoNE regarding inclusive education are reflected in written documents, but there are deficiencies in practice.

There are also three different projects on inclusive education carried out by the MoNE. One of them is the "Inclusive Education Teacher Training Module Project Manager Trainings." In these trainings, 951 trainers received training and provided local training to 74,849 managers (MoNE, 2022a). The Teacher Training Project for Inclusive Education Teacher Training Module was carried out in collaboration with UNICEF and under the coordination of Erciyes University. In-service training modules were prepared for teachers to strengthen the capacity of education personnel serving all children, especially disadvantaged children (e.g., children with special educational needs, refugee children under temporary protection, and children who have experienced violence), and to ensure that every child has access to quality inclusive education (MoNE, 2022b). The other work is the "Training of National Education Ministry Teachers with Foreign Students in Their Classes". In this training program, 612 school counselors provided training to 36412 teachers (MoNE, 2022c).

### **Objectives and Characteristics of Preschool Curriculum in Turkey**

In Turkey, preschool education is an optional education that covers the education of children who have not reached the age of compulsory primary education. This education aims to ensure the physical, mental, and emotional development of children, help them acquire good habits, prepare them for primary education, create a common environment for children coming from disadvantaged environments and families, and ensure that children speak Turkish correctly and beautifully (MoNE, 2013).

The current preschool curriculum in Turkey is organized in a spiral and eclectic structure to achieve these objectives (MoNE, 2013). In the preschool curriculum, learning outcomes and indicators have been determined considering the age characteristics, interests, and needs of students based on the general objectives of the Turkish National Education system and the general objectives of preschool education. The preschool curriculum has been prepared considering children's developmental characteristics in three different age groups (36-48, 48-60, and 60-72 months) based on their age levels. However, the learning outcomes and indicators have been stated without being divided into age groups (MoNE, 2013). In addition, example activities and the "Ministry of National Education Preschool Curriculum Integrated with Family Support Education Guide" were prepared and provided for the program implementers, namely teachers (MoNE, 2013). The preschool curriculum is characterized by focusing on student-centered activities, offering flexibility in teaching methods for teachers, considering all areas of children's development, emphasizing game-based and discovery learning, valuing creativity, considering connections with daily life, encouraging the use of resources from the immediate environment, highlighting the significance of learning centers, considering cultural and universal values, valuing family involvement, and recommending formative assessment (MoNE, 2013).

The curriculum is a framework that outlines the objectives teachers should achieve, the content they use to achieve these objectives and the teaching methods and techniques they employ. It also facilitates measuring the extent to which these objectives have been achieved. Curriculum is a tool that teachers use for inclusive education practices. When creating an inclusive educational environment, teachers consider the content and characteristics of the curriculum, adapting it to student profiles, differences, and diversity in the classroom. This way, they strive to personalize the curriculum according to the students. Characteristics such as student gender, motivation, need for special education, cultural background, learning styles, and migration status from different countries influence the type of activities the teachers conduct in the classroom, the teaching methods they use, and the types of assessments they employ. As such, teachers must carry out their classroom practices, considering a broader range of student needs to enhance inclusivity.

### **Purpose of the Research**

Indeed, when examining inclusive education in early childhood education, it is important to address the relationship between inclusive education and equality. The concept of 'equality' refers to results involving fair conditions and creating the necessary conditions for each child rather than achieving the same results for all children. From this perspective, inclusive education is not just about enrolling students in schools. Inclusive education is also concerned with developing the potential of every child through teaching practices, ensuring that every child has access to education, and receiving fair treatment from other children, families, staff, and community members who are part of the school (Underwood, Valeo, & Wood, 2012). Inclusion and childcare at an early age are about the participation of practitioners in education as much as they are about the participation of children and young people in education.

Participation refers to working collaboratively with others, learning, and studying. In addition, participation is related to an individual's self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-esteem (Booth, Ainscow, & Kingston, 2006, as cited in Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2014). In this context, inclusivity in the early childhood period is concerned with providing enriched learning environments that nourish and enhance the developmental potential of all children, making learning possible. Inclusion supports the active participation of every child as a full member of their own family and community. In this context, inclusive education requires curricula that support social, emotional, physical, and academic learning and skill acquisition (Underwood & Frankel, 2012).

Curriculum consists of elements such as objectives, contents, teaching-learning processes, and assessments. The goals, objectives, or learning outcomes in the curriculum affect the other three elements. Based on the learning outcomes, the content is selected, the methods for delivering this content are determined, and the extent to which the learning outcomes are achieved is evaluated. In this context, the researcher wondered whether the early childhood curriculum reflected the inclusive education approach and found it valuable to explore. Thus, the purpose of the study is to examine the early childhood curriculum in the context of inclusive education. As part of the study, the objectives, learning outcomes, and descriptions of the preschool curriculum were examined to determine how much they reflected the inclusive education approach. The following questions were answered within the scope of this general purpose:

1. What are the objectives and descriptions of the preschool curriculum in terms of the inclusive education approach?
2. To what extent do the learning outcomes of the preschool curriculum reflect the inclusive education approach?

By finding responses to these questions in line with the purpose of the research, traces of inclusivity will be revealed in the preschool curriculum, and the results of this study could be used as data in future curriculum development activities. By examining the learning outcomes that are part of the curriculum, this study takes a section of the whole and reveals its reflections. The results obtained from this study may help in preparing curricula that consider students' individual differences, try to include all students in line with the principle of equality, and increase inclusivity through enrichment and differentiation in learning outcomes, content, teaching-learning processes, and evaluation elements.

## **Method**

### **Research Model**

This study, which aims to examine the preschool curriculum in the context of an inclusive education approach, was conducted based on a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a research approach that uses qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interview, and document analysis to reveal perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic way in the natural environment through a qualitative process (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The data were collected using the document analysis method in the study. In qualitative studies, documents are an important source of data and may include both private and official documents (Creswell, 2005). The document analysis method, which focuses on how the topic under investigation is reflected in documents, is widely used in educational research (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010). Documentation materials can be public records, textbooks, letters, films, tapes, diaries, themes, reports, or other documents (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010). This study examined the preschool curriculum through a document analysis method, looking for traces and reflections of the inclusive education approach.

The research data were obtained from the preschool curriculum, which was updated and published by the Ministry of National Education Board of Education in 2013. The study is limited to the learning outcomes and indicators prepared for children with 36-72 months of age and the descriptions of the curriculum.

### **Document Analysis Process**

While conducting the document analysis, the approach suggested by Yıldırım and Şimşek (2016) was followed:

**1. Obtaining the Documents:** The preschool curriculum that came into effect in 2013 was downloaded from the official website of the Ministry of National Education's (MoNE) Curriculum Monitoring and Evaluation System (MoNE, 2022). This curriculum was first implemented in 2006 to be tested and developed. In 2012-2013, curriculum development work was completed, considering national and international field studies, feedback from practice, and current situation analyses carried out as part of the Strengthening Preschool Education Project. This curriculum has a "developmental", "spiral", and "eclectic" structure that considers children's developmental characteristics, interests, and needs, as well as environmental conditions.

**2. Evaluating the originality of documents:** Since the preschool curriculum was obtained from the Ministry of National Education's official website, it was considered original.

**3. Analyzing the Documents:** First, the descriptions given under the headings "Objectives of Preschool Education, Basic Principles of Preschool Education, Importance of Preschool Period, Introduction to Preschool Curriculum" in the introduction section of the preschool curriculum were examined from an inclusive education perspective. A

content analysis technique was employed while conducting this analysis. Appropriate codes were determined considering the statements in descriptions, and these codes were then put together under themes. Then, the learning outcomes and indicators given in the curriculum were examined using a rubric prepared by the researcher and the opinions of an expert (who had a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction). The learning outcomes were scored between 0 and 3 in order from least to most relevant using the rubric. There were four levels of scoring in the rubric (totally irrelevant: 0, slightly relevant: 1, moderately relevant: 2, highly relevant: 3). For example, learning outcome 4 on cognitive development, learning outcome 8 on language development, and learning outcome 6 on socio-emotional development were analyzed as in Table 1 below:

*Table 1. Example of Analyzing Learning Outcomes Using the Rubric.*

Learning Outcomes and Indicators	Totally Irrelevant (0)	Slightly Relevant (1)	Moderately Relevant (2)	Highly Relevant (3)
Learning Outcome 4: Counts the objects. Indicators: Counts rhythmically forwards/backwards one by one. Shows the number of objects specified. Tells how many objects they have counted. Tells the number that indicates the sequential order. Tells the number that comes before a given number in numbers up to 10. Tells the number that comes after a given number in numbers up to 10.	X			
Learning Outcome 8: Describes what they listen to/watch in various ways. Indicators: Asks questions about what they listen/watch. Answers questions about what they listen/watch. Tells others what they have heard/watched. Exhibits what they listen to/watch through drawing. Exhibits what they listen to/watch through music. Exhibits what they listen to/watch through drama. Exhibits what they listen to/watch through poetry. Exhibits what they listen to/watch through stories.		X		
Learning Outcome 6: Protect their own and others' rights. Indicators: Expresses their rights. Expresses that others have rights. Reacts when wronged. Reacts when others are wronged.				X

As seen in Table 1, each learning outcome has its own indicators. The researcher analyzed the learning outcomes within the context of an inclusive education approach by reading the learning outcomes and the behaviors students would exhibit and marked their level of relevance.

### **Reliability**

The learning outcomes addressed in the study were examined by two people with Ph.D. degrees in curriculum and instruction and in child development, respectively. The inter-coder reliability between the content analyses conducted by the experts was determined using Miles and Huberman's reliability formula ( $\text{Reliability} = \text{Consensus} / (\text{Consensus} + \text{Disagreement})$ ; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The reliability between the two coders was 0.89. The experts evaluated the learning outcomes in the context of inclusive education and rated them on a scale of 0-3, from least to most relevant (totally irrelevant: 0, slightly relevant: 1, moderately relevant: 2, highly relevant: 3). The reliability between the experts was examined using the Kappa Agreement Measurement, and the consensus value between the two experts was 0.73.

## **Findings**

This study attempted to determine to what extent the objectives, learning outcomes, and descriptions of the preschool curriculum reflect the inclusive education approach.

### **1. Appearance of the Preschool Curriculum Objectives and Descriptions from an Inclusive Education Perspective**

This section presents the findings obtained from the examination of the Objectives and Descriptions of the Preschool Curriculum. When the preschool curriculum was examined, it had four objectives. These objectives (MoNE, 2013):

1. Ensure children's physical, mental, and emotional development and help them gain good habits
2. Prepare them for primary school
3. Create a common educational environment for children coming from disadvantaged environments and families
4. Ensure that children speak Turkish correctly and beautifully

According to these objectives, the preschool curriculum aims to develop children in all areas of development, prepare them for primary school, provide a common educational environment for disadvantaged children, and have them speak their native language correctly and beautifully. When they were considered from the perspective of inclusive education, only a third of these objectives were related to inclusive education. The third objective indicates including children from disadvantaged areas in the education process and creating a common educational environment for them with other children, which overlaps with the aim of inclusive education to ensure that all students participate in the education process.

After the objectives in the preschool curriculum, descriptions are provided under the headings "Basic Principles of Preschool Education, Importance of the Preschool Period, and Introduction to the Preschool Education Program." These descriptions were read and examined from an inclusive education perspective. Subsequently, the codes and themes determined for the reflections of inclusive education are given in Table 2.

As seen in Table 2, 31 codes were created when the descriptions of the preschool education program were analyzed. These codes were grouped into five themes. The codes of democratic learning environment (2), diversity in learning environment (2), different learning centers (1), and using indoor and outdoor settings (1) were grouped under the



theme of *inclusive learning environment*. The codes of making adjustments according to environmental conditions (4), adding or removing learning outcomes (1), showing flexibility (4), game-based instruction (2), diversity in teaching methods and techniques (4), conducting different types of activities (3), conducting large group, small group, or individual work (1), diversity in teaching materials (3), and enrichment and differentiation in teaching (3) were clustered under the theme of *inclusive teaching process*. The codes of considering individual differences (5), valuing, and developing all areas of development (3), conducting different types of activities (3), enriching and differentiating instruction (3), and increasing learning opportunities (3) were grouped under the theme of *inclusive teaching*.

*Table 2. Findings regarding the reflections of the inclusive education in descriptions given in the preschool curriculum.*

Themes	Codes	f
Inclusive learning environment	Democratic learning environment	2
	Diversity in learning environment	2
	Different learning centers	1
	Using indoor and outdoor settings	1
Inclusive teaching process	Adjusting according to environmental conditions	4
	Adding or removing learning outcomes	1
	Showing flexibility	4
	Game-based instruction	2
	Diversity in teaching methods and techniques	4
	Conducting different types of activities	3
	Conducting large group, small group, and individual work	1
	Diversity in teaching materials	3
Enrichment and differentiation in teaching	3	
Inclusive teacher	Considering individual differences	5
	Valuing and developing all areas of development	3
	Conducting different types of activities	3
	Enriching and differentiating instruction	2
	Increasing learning opportunities	3
Inclusive school	Providing adult support	1
	Involving families in teaching processes	1
	Providing guidance to students	2
	Giving importance to teamwork	2
	Supporting teacher-family cooperation	1
Increasing Participation	Valuing individual differences	5
	Including all children	2
	Respecting differences	1
	Teaching values such as respect, tolerance, solidarity, and sharing	1
	Making adaptations for children with special needs.	1
	Creating equal opportunities	1
	Providing inclusive education	1
Preparing and implementing individualized education plan	1	

The codes of providing adult support (1), involving families in teaching processes (1), providing guidance to students (2), giving importance to teamwork (2), and supporting teacher-family cooperation (1) were grouped under the theme, *inclusive school*. Further, the codes of valuing individual differences (5), including all children (2), respecting differences (1), teaching values such as respect, tolerance, solidarity, and sharing (1), making adaptations for children with special needs (1), creating equal opportunities (1), providing inclusive education (1), preparing and implementing an individualized education plan, and (1) were grouped under the theme of *increasing participation*. Based on these findings, the code, considering individual differences, appears more frequently in different themes compared to other codes. In addition, ensuring diversity in teaching methods and techniques, showing flexibility, and adjusting according to environmental conditions were also highlighted in the descriptions.

### 3. Appearance of Preschool Curriculum Learning Outcomes from an Inclusive Education Perspective

This section presents the findings obtained from the analysis of the preschool curriculum learning outcomes in Table 2 from an inclusive education perspective. As seen in Table 2, the preschool curriculum included 63 learning outcomes concerning five different development areas. Most learning outcomes (33.3%) focused on cognitive development in the curriculum. Cognitive development was followed by socio-emotional development (27%), language development (19%), and self-care skills (12.7%). Contrarily, the motor development area had the fewest learning outcomes in the preschool curriculum (8%).

Table 2. Findings obtained from the analysis of the learning outcomes given in the preschool curriculum from an inclusive education perspective

Development areas	Totally irrelevant	Slightly relevant	Moderately relevant	Highly relevant	Total	%
Cognitive Development	12	9	0	0	21	33.3
Language Development	4	7	1	0	12	19
Motor Development	5	0	0	0	5	8
Socio-Emotional Development	1	5	6	5	17	27
Self-Care Skills	7	0	0	1	8	12.7
Total	29	21	7	6	63	100

When examined in terms of inclusive education, 12 out of 21 learning outcomes in the cognitive development area were totally irrelevant to inclusive education, 9 were slightly relevant, but no learning outcome was moderately or highly relevant. Of 12 learning outcomes on language development, 5 were totally irrelevant to inclusive education, 7 were slightly relevant, and 1 was moderately relevant, whereas no learning outcome was highly relevant. In contrast, all 5 learning outcomes in motor development were totally irrelevant in terms of inclusive education. Regarding socio-emotional development, out of 17 learning outcomes on socio-emotional development, 1 was totally irrelevant to inclusive education, 5 were slightly relevant, 6 were moderately relevant, and 5 were highly relevant. Overall, out of 63 learning outcomes given in the preschool curriculum, 29 were totally irrelevant to inclusive education, 21 were slightly relevant, 7

were moderately relevant, and 6 were highly relevant. Considering the areas of development, none of the learning outcomes on motor development reflected inclusive education. Another finding showed that the socio-emotional development area reflected inclusive education the most.

### **Discussion**

In this study, which examined the preschool curriculum in terms of inclusive education, the objectives of the preschool curriculum were reviewed. The study determined that out of the four objectives of the preschool curriculum, only the third objective (creating a common educational environment for children from disadvantaged environments and families) was related to inclusive education. The third objective stated including children from disadvantaged areas in the educational process and creating a common educational environment with other children, which coincided with the aim of inclusive education to ensure the participation of all students in the educational process. Ainscow (2005) states that inclusive education is a process and that all students should be present and participate in education, emphasizing that monitoring and including at-risk groups is important and necessary in terms of inclusivity. In social justification, one of the three justifications suggested by UNESCO (2009) regarding the essentiality of inclusive education, it is highlighted that inclusive schools are necessary for creating a more inclusive and fair society by promoting attitude change and including all children in education. In this context, inclusion of children from disadvantaged areas in education in the preschool curriculum objectives is related to and reflects the characteristics of inclusive education, such as “Everyone has the right to education and everyone can learn” and “Inclusive education reduces barriers to access and learning not only for students with disabilities but also for all groups that require special policies in education” (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; MEB ÖERHGM, 2013; Stubbs, 2008).

As part of the study, 31 codes were created from the analysis of the descriptions in the preschool curriculum, and these codes were grouped under five themes: inclusive learning environment, inclusive teaching process, inclusive teacher, inclusive school, and increasing participation. The code, considering individual differences, was found under two different themes among these codes and appeared more frequently than other codes. Additionally, ensuring diversity in teaching methods and techniques, showing flexibility, and adjusting according to environmental conditions were highlighted more than in other codes.

The theme of inclusive learning environments included the following codes: democratic learning environments, diversity in learning environments, different learning centers, and using indoor and outdoor settings. A democratic classroom environment is one of the main characteristics of an inclusive school. In such an environment, all students can freely share their ideas, establish class rules, and participate in decisions about their learning processes. In addition, in a classroom with a democratic atmosphere, students can develop a common sense of working in collaboration with each other (Çelik, 2017; Öztürk, Tepetaş, Köksal, & İrez, 2017). As a social justification for inclusive education, UNESCO (2009) declares that schools need inclusive education to create more inclusive and fair societies. The characteristic of creating a democratic learning environment given in the preschool curriculum is important for students to express their opinions in a free environment and to adopt this understanding as a part of a fair society in the future.

The presence of different learning centers in the school environment and the use of indoor and outdoor spaces are critical for inclusivity in terms of increasing differentiation in the environment. For inclusive learning environments, Tomlinson (2000) suggests creating quiet and non-distracting workspaces in addition to collaborative settings for working in small groups. The classroom should have materials

that reflect various cultures and home environments, and suitable environments should also be created for students who prefer to work independently. From this perspective, it appears that the preschool curriculum emphasizes creating an inclusive learning environment. The theme, inclusive teaching process, involved adjusting according to environmental conditions, adding or removing learning outcomes, showing flexibility, using game-based instruction, diversifying teaching methods and techniques, conducting different types of activities, conducting large group, small group, or individual work, diversifying teaching materials, and enriching and differentiating instruction. One of the important elements in increasing inclusivity in schools is the flexible structure of the preschool curriculum, which allows practitioners to adjust the program according to environmental conditions and add or remove learning outcomes as needed.

In inclusive education systems, these adjustments in classrooms and schools may provide equal access to learning and enable the preparation of supportive structures required for inclusive education using individualized curriculum, thereby providing a quality education that includes every student (Forlin et al., as cited in ERG, 2016a). According to UNESCO (2009), the educational justification for inclusive education is that an inclusive school should develop teaching methods and techniques that consider the individual differences of students in the school and ensure that all students benefit from the developed teaching methods and techniques. In this context, diversifying teaching methods and techniques, conducting different types of activities, diversifying teaching materials, and differentiation in instruction through enrichment in the preschool curriculum are congruent with the educational justification for inclusive education emphasized by UNESCO.

Applications for enrichment, differentiation, and diversification in teaching processes emphasized in the preschool curriculum are of great importance in terms of the individualization of instruction. Individualization of instruction is also one of the characteristics of inclusive education practices, and instruction should be individualized for all children in every setting (Booth et al., 2006, as cited in Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2014; Guralnick, 2008; Underwood & Frankel, 2012). However, the value given to diversity and enrichment in teaching processes has not been given to assessment. Concerning the evaluation in the preschool curriculum, it has been mentioned that evaluation should only focus on evaluating the program, students, and teachers' self-evaluation and that process evaluation is needed rather than outcome evaluation. There was no explanation about which methods could be used or how diversity could be ensured in the evaluation process.

Under the theme of inclusive teacher, there were the codes: considering individual differences, valuing, and developing all areas of development, applying various types of activities, enriching and differentiating teaching, and increasing learning opportunities. Additionally, one of the critical factors in creating an inclusive school environment is the teacher. It is important for the teacher to prepare, implement, and evaluate activities that include all students in the classroom environment in terms of inclusivity. A classroom environment created by the teacher with inclusive activities can ensure that every student feels comfortable and motivated to learn as a member of the class, thus increasing both their academic achievement and sense of belonging to the school (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009). In the preschool curriculum, the teacher's consideration of individual differences and the emphasis on developing all areas of development reflect the characteristics of inclusive education, such as "Every student's learning needs should be taken into account" and "Everyone has the right to education, and everyone can learn" (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; MEB ÖERHGM, 2013; Stubbs, 2008). Similarly, Ainscow's (2005) opinion that "All students must be involved in the process and participate in education for inclusivity" is also consistent with the findings of the study.

The theme, inclusive school, included the following codes: providing adult support, involving families in teaching processes, providing guidance to students, giving importance to teamwork, and supporting teacher-family cooperation. An inclusive school recognizes and values students and parents as integral parts of the school (Department of Education and Training (DfET), 2004). Some studies on inclusive education (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; MEB ÖERHGM, 2013; Stubbs, 2008) have identified the fundamental characteristics of inclusive education. The codes of providing adult support, providing guidance, and teacher-family cooperation in the preschool curriculum reflect the following characteristics of inclusive education: “Every individual may need support in the learning process” and “The school, teacher, family, and community are primarily responsible for facilitating the learning process.”

The theme of increasing participation included the following codes: including all children, respecting differences, teaching values such as respect, tolerance, solidarity, and sharing, making adaptations for children with special needs, creating equal opportunities, providing inclusive education, and preparing and implementing an individualized education plan. Emphasizing the inclusion of all children in the preschool curriculum and showing respect for differences reflect the idea of inclusive education, namely developing the potential of every kid through education (Underwood, Valeo, & Wood, 2012). UNESCO (2009) explains the economic justification for inclusive education by stating that schools that provide education to all children together are less costly than educational institutions that provide different education for different children.

Inclusion of students with special needs in inclusive education in the same school and classroom with their peers in the preschool curriculum coincides with the economic justification of inclusive education. Additionally, the view that inclusiveness specifically emphasizes student groups that may be at risk of exclusion or low achievement (Ainscow, 2005) also supports this finding of the current study. However, the concept of inclusive education is not only about the integration of students with special needs into regular classes but is also used in a broader sense, including cultural and linguistic diversity, to emphasize the growing diversity in schools (Ainscow, 2005; Pantić, Closs, & Ivošević, 2011). In this context, inclusive education is also an approach that attempts to meet the educational needs and deficiencies of children with refugee, asylum seeker, immigrant, and similar statuses (Nuth, 2018). Inclusive education aims at eliminating social exclusion resulting from attitudes and reactions to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender, and abilities (Vitello & Mithaug, 1998; as cited in Ainscow & César, 2006). In this respect, it appears that there is no emphasis on these students in the preschool curriculum, falling short in meeting the educational needs of children with refugee, asylum seeker, immigrant, or similar statuses.

The results indicated that there was a total of 63 learning outcomes in the preschool curriculum, of which 21 were on cognitive development, 12 on language development, 5 on motor development, 17 on socio-emotional development, and 8 on self-care skills. Further, 29 of these learning outcomes were found to be totally irrelevant to inclusive education, 21 were slightly relevant, 7 were moderately relevant, and 6 were highly relevant. Considering the development areas, only nine learning outcomes on cognitive development were slightly relevant. As such, seven learning outcomes on language development were slightly relevant and one was moderately relevant. Of the learning outcomes on self-care skills, only one was highly relevant. However, none of the learning outcomes on motor development reflected inclusive education. Another finding also showed that the socio-emotional development area reflects inclusive education the most. These findings are like those of Gürkan and Koran’s (2014) study, which examined the participation rights of children in the preschool curriculum. Gürkan and Koran (2014) found that two learning outcomes on cognitive development, three on language development, one on self-care, and nine on socio-emotional development were related to

participation rights, but none of the learning outcomes on motor development were related to participation rights. A study examining the basic education curriculum (grades 1-8) in terms of multiculturalism in Turkey found that the learning outcomes in these programs reflect a low level of inclusive education (Şimşek et al., 2019).

To make the school system more inclusive, it is necessary to first organize the education goals, objectives, or learning outcomes in the curricula from an inclusive education perspective. This is because the curriculum consists of four basic components: goals, content, educational status, and evaluation, and goals play a leading role in organizing the other components. In this context, increasing the inclusiveness of the learning outcomes at the outset would be very useful.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

To ensure inclusiveness, it is of primary importance for the curriculum to consider the conditions of the environment where the school is located, be flexible enough and adaptable to the environment, and consider families and teachers as stakeholders in education. The study found that only the third objective of the preschool curriculum was related to inclusive education (i.e., creating a common educational environment for children from disadvantaged environments and families). Furthermore, 31 codes were created from the analysis of the descriptions provided in the preschool curriculum and categorized under five themes: inclusive learning environment, inclusive teaching process, inclusive teacher, inclusive school, and increasing participation. It was determined that the preschool curriculum places importance on creating an inclusive learning environment.

Enrichment, differentiation, and diversification practices emphasized in the learning environment and teaching process in the preschool curriculum are indispensable in terms of individualizing education, and this approach has been adopted in the curriculum. There was no explanation about which methods could be used in the evaluation process or how diversity could be ensured, which is considered a deficiency. The teacher's preparation, implementation, and evaluation of activities that involve all students in the classroom setting are important in terms of inclusivity, and the characteristics of an inclusive teacher have been considered in the preschool curriculum. The study determined that the inclusive school feature has been considered in the preschool curriculum by placing importance on school-family-teacher cooperation and providing guidance to students by giving them adult support.

In addition, the results showed that individual differences are emphasized for increasing participation, inclusion of all students in education is paid attention to, providing inclusive education for students with special needs is mentioned, and making adaptations in the preschool curriculum is considered. However, there was no emphasis on children with refugee, asylum seeker, immigrant, or similar statuses in the preschool curriculum, and it was inadequate in meeting the educational needs of these students. It was determined that out of 63 learning outcomes given in the preschool curriculum, 29 were totally relevant to inclusive education, 21 were slightly relevant, 7 were moderately relevant, and 6 were highly relevant. Considering the development areas, none of the learning outcomes on motor development reflected inclusive education. By contrast, the socio-emotional development area reflected inclusive education the most. In this context, one could say that the learning outcomes in the preschool curriculum reflect inclusive education at a low level.

In conclusion, when the general objectives and descriptions of the preschool curriculum were examined, it was revealed that the inclusive education approach is considered and adopted, but there are deficiencies in the evaluation process and the inclusion of refugee students. However, the number of learning outcomes and indicators

reflecting inclusive education was quite low. In this context, including methods and techniques that can be used in the evaluation process in the curriculum and providing examples of practices that can be implemented to ensure diversity in the evaluation process may eliminate this deficiency in the curriculum. Additionally, it is recommended to reconsider the learning outcomes in terms of inclusiveness and to increase the number of learning outcomes that reflect inclusive education. Furthermore, future scientific studies on this subject could examine the extent to which inclusiveness has been considered in the implementation process of the preschool curriculum by using methods such as observation and interview.

All the rules given in the “Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive” were complied with, and none of the “Actions Violating Scientific Research and Publication Ethics” mentioned in the second section of the directive were performed.

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