

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Examination of postgraduate theses in the field of preschool education in Turkey

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Ethical Statement

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"No conflict of interest is present in the conduction or the reporting of this study."

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine postgraduate theses conducted in the field of Early Childhood Education in Turkey between 2013 and 2023. In this study, data was collected using the technique of document analysis, which is one of the qualitative research methods. The population of the study consists of 352 postgraduate theses published in the National Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education between 2013 and 2023. The sample of the research consists of 191 master's theses and 21 doctoral theses that have been approved and published in the Department of Preschool Education, Department of Elementary Education, Department of Educational Sciences, and Department of Primary Education, all of which are openly accessible. The sample of the research also constitutes the study group of the research. The research findings indicate that the majority of the postgraduate theses conducted between 2013 and 2023 were master's theses. It is noteworthy that the number of doctoral theses is limited. The maximum year in which a postgraduate thesis was published has been determined as 2019. According to the findings obtained, the number of female authors and female advisors is significantly higher than the number of male authors and male advisors. Most postgraduate theses were conducted at the Institute of Educational Sciences. The conclusion has been reached that the most frequently coded focal point is "Education".

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Graduate Thesis, Open Access

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INTRODUCTION

The pre-school period refers to the time from birth to the day a child starts primary school, which encompasses critical periods of rapid development and learning. It is during this period that the foundations for future life cycles and personality development are laid, and basic skills and habits are acquired. The preschool period is the most susceptible period for a child to be influenced by their surrounding experiences. During this period, children become more sensitive to their surroundings, encode their experiences in their minds, and strive to maximize their potential with the opportunities provided by their environment.

Preschool education aims to support the development of children from birth until they start school, help them acquire fundamental skills, ensure equal conditions for starting primary school, and transmit societal and cultural values from generation to generation through education. The Ministry of National Education (2013) has defined the objectives of Early Childhood Education as "ensuring that children acquire physical, emotional, and cognitive skills as well as good habits, preparing children for primary school, creating a common educational environment for children coming from disadvantaged environments and families, and enabling children to speak Turkish correctly and beautifully." With a well-structured and high-quality preschool education, individuals who can freely express their emotions and thoughts, are creative, respectful of their own and others' rights, and are mentally and physically healthy are raised. The educational environments to be prepared in the pre-school period should be child-centered, supporting the child's curiosity for learning, providing equal opportunities and a rich stimulating environment for all children, and enabling the development of their potentials through various methods and techniques to make education more effective.

Preschool education is in a reciprocal interaction with social and cultural changes. Schools are one of the areas most affected by social and cultural changes. In this transformation, the role of universities is quite significant (Kuyumcu & Erdoğan, 2008). Scientific studies conducted in universities can be seen as a tool to provide information on how education should be adapted to societal and cultural changes, as well as the role and effects of educational changes in societal and cultural life. Academics can utilize metaphors more extensively in their interactions with preschool teachers, in the sharing and shaping of concepts, and in the development of instructional strategies (Uslu, 2019). Research can shed light on how education can be conducted in a more high-quality and effective manner by examining the effectiveness of the plans, programs, methods, and techniques implemented in the field of education, as well as addressing the questions that education has to answer.

When examining pre-school programs, it is evident that these programs are constantly evolving in accordance with children's interests, needs, and developmental characteristics, as well as the changing needs of society and theories of development and learning. Evaluation studies and feedback regarding the effectiveness and feasibility of these programs play a significant role in these changes (Gülay Ögelman & Karakuzu, 2016). Literary reviews facilitate researchers in keeping up with the latest advancements in their field and enable systematic access to information by highlighting the progress made in a particular area (Erdem, 2011). Researchers can identify areas of need more easily by analyzing existing studies. Therefore, research studies should be written in a more detailed and explicit manner, providing all the necessary details to a person who wishes to replicate the same study, and leaving no questions in the reader's mind. This includes sections such as model, population, sample, and analysis, which should be written in a more elaborate and clear manner (Yılmaz & Altinkurt, 2012).

Upon examining the literature, it has been determined that studies have been conducted regarding the analysis of

postgraduate theses in the field of Early Childhood Education. In his study conducted in 2013, Ahi ve Kıldan examined 77 postgraduate theses conducted in the field of early childhood education in Turkey. According to the research findings, it has been determined that the majority of the theses conducted in the field are master's theses, the most researched topic is education, and the study groups in the theses mostly consist of children. Şahin and Bartan (2017) examined 130 postgraduate theses conducted in the field of early childhood education in Turkey. They have concluded that 108 of the theses examined are master's theses, whereas 22 are doctoral theses. The examination revealed that postgraduate theses in the field of early childhood education are predominantly conducted in social sciences and education institutes. It has been determined that the majority of postgraduate theses revolve around education and teaching topics. It has been stated that the least studied subjects are feeding, mathematics education, and child health. According to empirical and complex patterned research, it has been concluded that quantitative research designs are preferred more.

Ünver and Gülbahar (2022) have examined 49 postgraduate theses prepared based on the Ministry of National Education's Preschool Education Program. The research findings indicate that out of 49 theses, 40 were master's theses and 9 were doctoral theses. According to the obtained data, it has been determined that quantitative approaches are more prevalent and the descriptive survey method is often preferred. It is stated that the theses belonging to the Institute of Educational Sciences are published the most.

Demirtaş İlhan and Tantekin Erten (2019) have examined postgraduate studies in early childhood education. According to the findings on the topics of postgraduate theses, it has been concluded that theses focusing on education, development, and teacher/administrator issues are preferred as the most common research topics at the master's level in early childhood education (Demirtaş İlhan & Tantekin Erden, 2019).

Tavşancıl, Bağcan Büyükturan, and Özmen (2012) examined 186 postgraduate theses completed between 2000 and 2008 in state university Institutes of Educational Sciences in Turkey. Research indicates that postgraduate theses are typically conducted at the elementary school level and that study groups are predominantly composed of students. It has been found that survey research is preferred more than experimental research.

Reviewing the literature, evaluating previous studies and identifying areas of need is a guide for future studies. This study is considered as a research that aims to clarify the current situation regarding postgraduate theses available at the National Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education, covering the years 2013-2023. The aim of this study is to examine the general trend of graduate theses in the field of Preschool Education in the National Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education covering the years 2013-2023, to present the analysis of existing studies according to various variables for future studies, to bring a new perspective and to contribute to the field of preschool education with different ideas. In this context, answers have been sought for the following questions:

The open access postgraduate theses in the field of Early Childhood Education conducted between 2013 and 2023;

- a. What is the distribution by years?
- b. What is the distribution according to publication type?
- c. What is the distribution of writers and consultants by gender?
- d. What is the distribution of the geographical regions where it is published?
- e. What is the distribution by university, institute and department?

- f. What is the distribution of research model, research method, study group and data collection techniques?
- g. What is the distribution of the number of research problems, solutions and suggestions?
- h. What is the distribution of the focal points of theses?

METHOD

Research Design

In this study, the general survey model, which is one of the quantitative research methods, was utilized. In the general scanning model, a scan is performed on the entire universe or a subset of it, consisting of a large number of elements, in order to get a general judgment about the universe (Bahtiyar & Can, 2016).

Setting and Participants

The scope of the study consists of 352 postgraduate theses prepared in the field of early childhood education between the years 2013-2023. The sample of the study was determined using criterion sampling, which is one of the purposive sampling methods. The criterion used in the study is that the theses should be registered in the Pre-School Education, Primary Education, Educational Sciences, and Elementary Education Departments, and should have open access and be approved by the Higher Education Council Thesis Documentation Center within the years 2013-2023. Within this context, a sample of work consisting of 212 theses registered at the Higher Education Council Thesis Documentation Center was examined, which were prepared within the scope of Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, Educational Sciences, and Primary Education Department. The selected theses serve as the study group for the research sample.

Data Collection Tools

The researcher utilized a thesis analysis form developed for the scanning of relevant literature and examination of the theses available for access in the Higher Education Council National Thesis Center between 2013 and 2023.

Data Analysis

The research tendencies of these theses have been described using the technique of document analysis within the framework of qualitative research methods. The data was examined by two data coders during the analysis process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

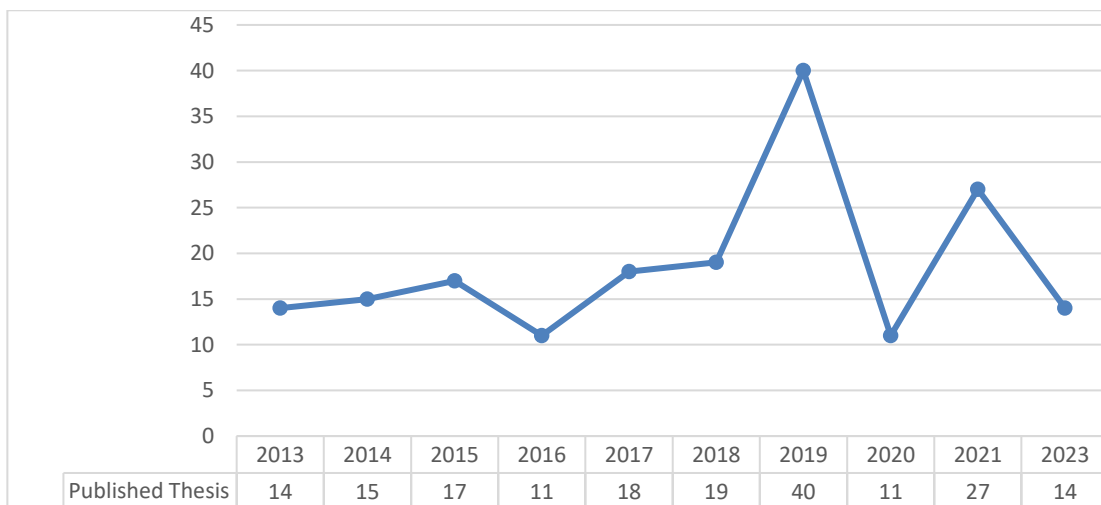
The research questions related to the postgraduate theses prepared in the field of Early Childhood Education during 2013-2023 have been presented in tables, figures, and interpretations based on the obtained data:

- 1.1. *What is the distribution of open access postgraduate theses in the field of Early Childhood Education published between 2013 and 2023, broken down by year?*

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of open access postgraduate theses in the field of Early Childhood Education between the years 2013 and 2023, categorized by year.

Table 1

Distribution of postgraduate by year



When Table 1 is examined, it can be seen that 18.86% of the theses in the field of Early Childhood Education were conducted in 2019. It has been determined that there has been a consistent increase in the number of theses conducted in the field of Early Childhood Education between 2013 and 2015. The number of theses conducted in 2013 was 14 (6.60%), whereas in 2014 it increased to 15 (7.07%). The number of theses conducted in 2015 was determined to be 17 (8.01%), whereas in 2016, the number decreased to 11 (5.18%). The number of theses was determined to be 18 (8.49) in 2017 and 19 (8.96) in 2018. Between 2019 and 2020, there was a significant decrease in the number of theses, with only 11 (5.18%) theses being produced in 2020.

1.2. How is the distribution of open access postgraduate theses in the field of Early Childhood Education between the years 2013 and 2023 categorized by publication types?

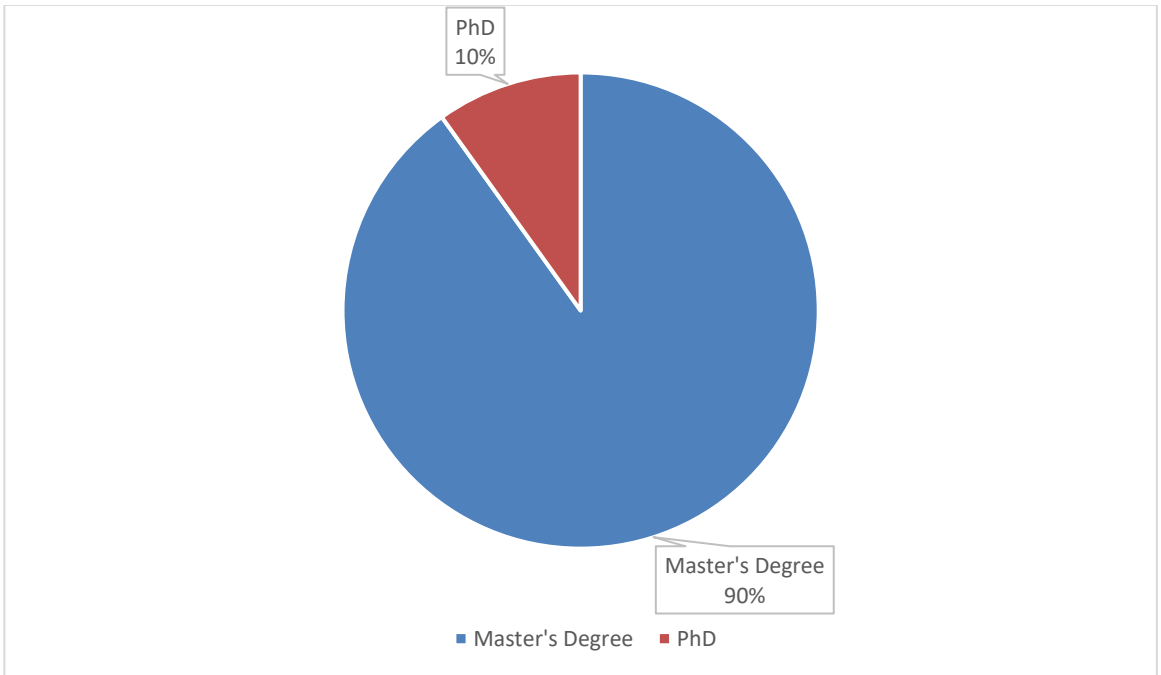


Figure 1 shows the distribution of postgraduate theses according to publication types.

Upon examining Figure 1, it is evident that the theses conducted between 2013 and 2023 predominantly consist of master's theses. Between 2013 and 2023, it was determined that 191 master's theses (90%) were conducted in the field of Early Childhood Education, while 21 doctoral theses (10%) were conducted. Upon examination of this situation, it has been determined that there is a significant disparity in the number of master's theses being conducted compared to the limited number of doctoral theses.

3.3. How is the distribution of authors and advisors of open access graduate theses published in the field of Preschool Education between 2013-2023 according to their gender?

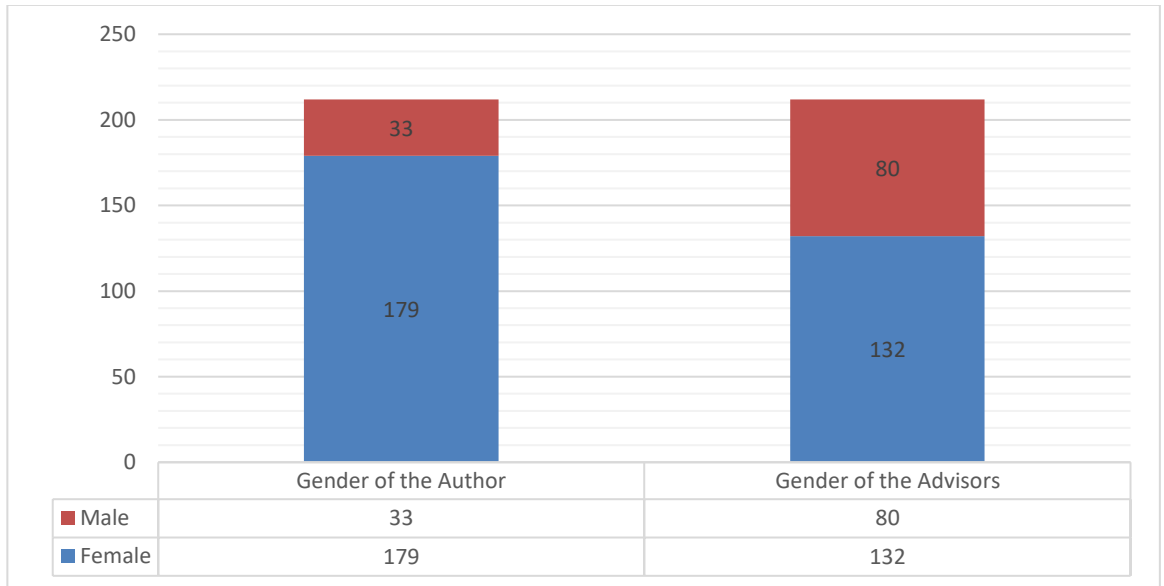


Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of postgraduate theses according to the genders of the authors and advisors.

When examining Figure 2, it is seen that between 2013 and 2023, 33 males (15.5%) and 179 females (84.43%) have published postgraduate theses in the field of Early Childhood Education. It is noteworthy that the majority of postgraduate theses in the field of Early Childhood Education are authored by women. When examining the genders of thesis advisors in the field of Early Childhood Education, it was determined that the number of male thesis advisors is 80 (37.73%) and the number of female thesis advisors is 132 (62.26%).

1.3. What is the distribution of geographical regions where open access postgraduate theses in the field of Early Childhood Education were published between 2013 and 2023?

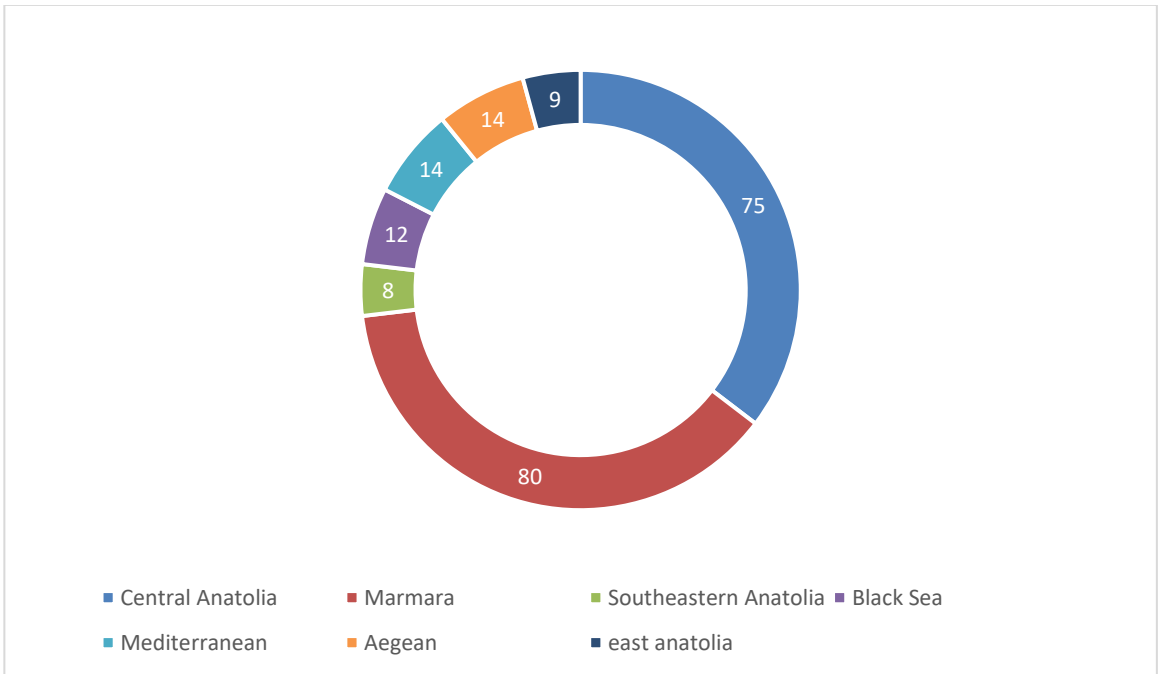


Figure 3 Postgraduate theses according to geographical regions.

When considering the geographical distribution of postgraduate theses, it can be observed that the Marmara Region has the highest number of theses with 80 (38%), followed by the Central Anatolia Region with 75 (35%) theses. Almost three-quarters (73.11%) of the total postgraduate theses published in the Marmara and Central Anatolia regions make up a total of 155 theses. In the Aegean region, 14 (6.60%) theses have been published, while in the Mediterranean region, 14 (6.60%) theses have been published, and in the Black Sea region, 12 (5.66%) theses have been published. It has been determined that the Eastern Anatolia Region has the lowest number of postgraduate theses published in the field of Early Childhood Education, with 9 (4.24%) theses, followed by the Southeastern Anatolia Region with 8 (3.77%) theses.

1.4. What is the distribution of institutes and departments where open access postgraduate theses in the field of Early Childhood Education were published between 2013 and 2023?

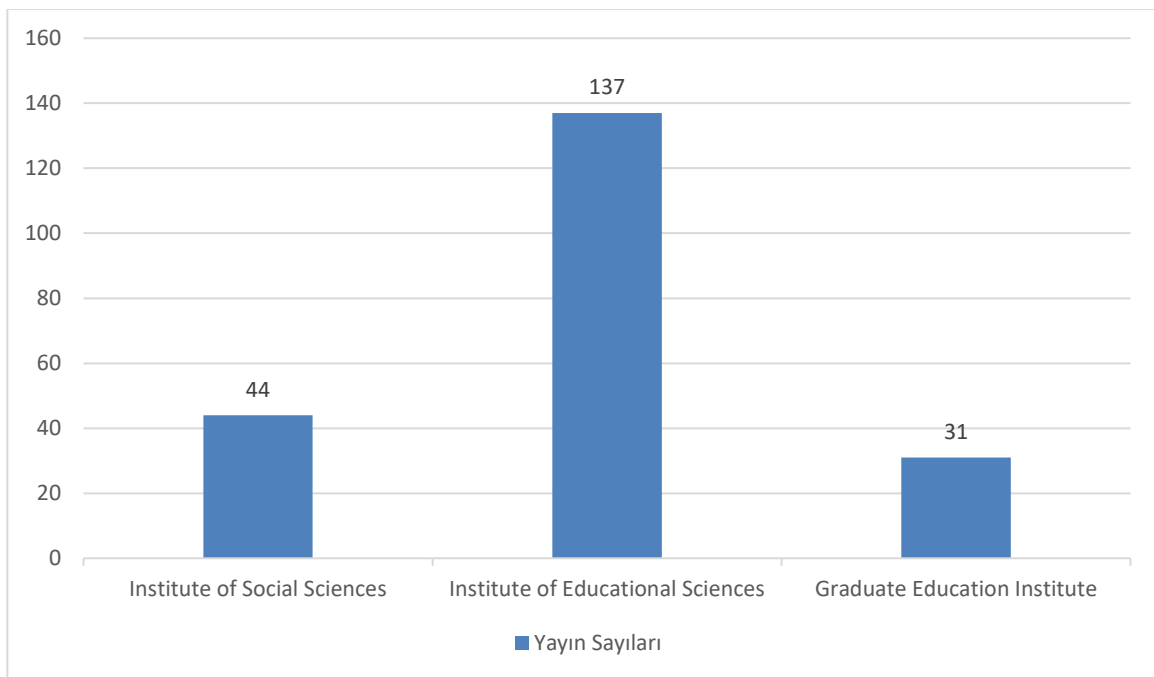


Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of postgraduate theses according to the institutes where they were published.

The findings indicate that the majority of the theses conducted in the field of Early Childhood Education between 2013 and 2023 were affiliated with the Institute of Educational Sciences (64.62%). The percentage of postgraduate theses published in the Institute of Social Sciences has been determined to be 20.75%. The percentage of theses published in the Graduate Education Institute has been determined to be 14.62%. Considering the number of postgraduate theses, the Institute of Educational Sciences has the highest number of theses with 137, while the Institute of Social Sciences is identified as the second highest with 44 theses. The Graduate Education Institute has been identified as the institute with the minimum number of theses, with a total of 31 theses.

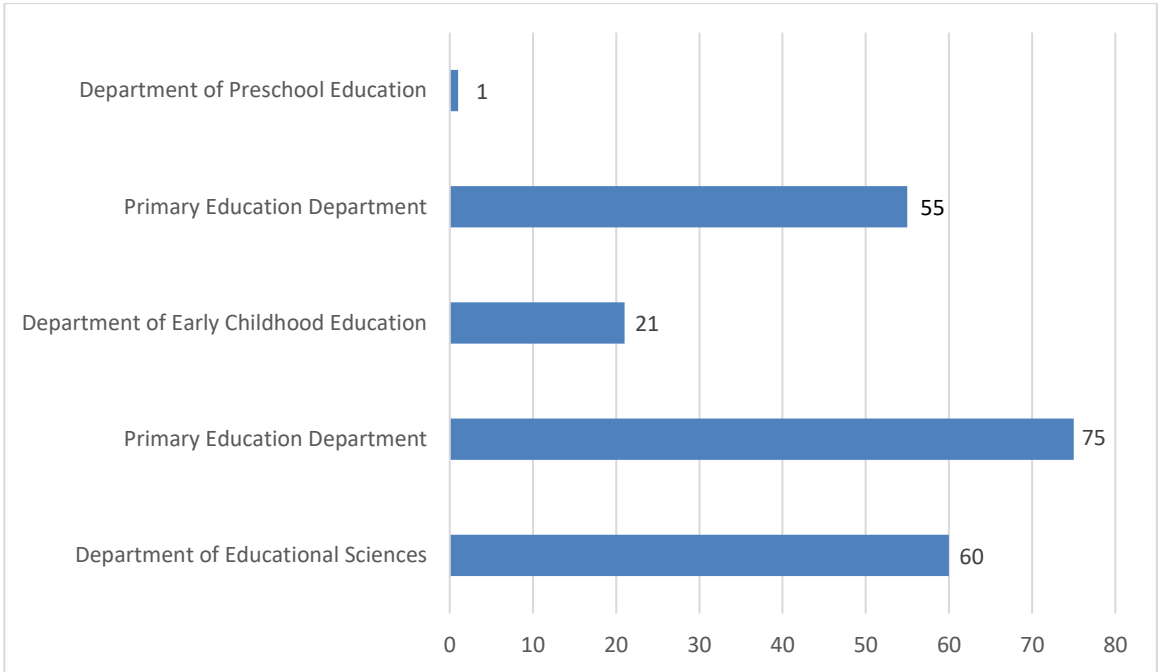


Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of postgraduate theses according to the departments in which they are published.

Upon examining Figure 5, it was determined that the majority of postgraduate theses conducted between 2013 and 2023 were in the field of Elementary Education and Educational Sciences. Of the postgraduate theses conducted in the field of Early Childhood Education, 75% (35.37%) have been published in the Department of Primary Education. It has been determined that 60 theses (28.30%) have been published in the Department of Educational Sciences. The Primary Education Department has been the most prolific in terms of thesis publications in the field of Early Childhood Education, with 55 (25.94%) publications. In the Department of Early Childhood Education, 21 theses (9.90%) have been published. The department of Preschool Education has the lowest number of postgraduate publications, with only 1 (0.47) thesis.

3.6. How is the distribution of research models, research methods, study groups, and data collection techniques used in open access postgraduate theses published in the field of Early Childhood Education between 2013 and 2023?

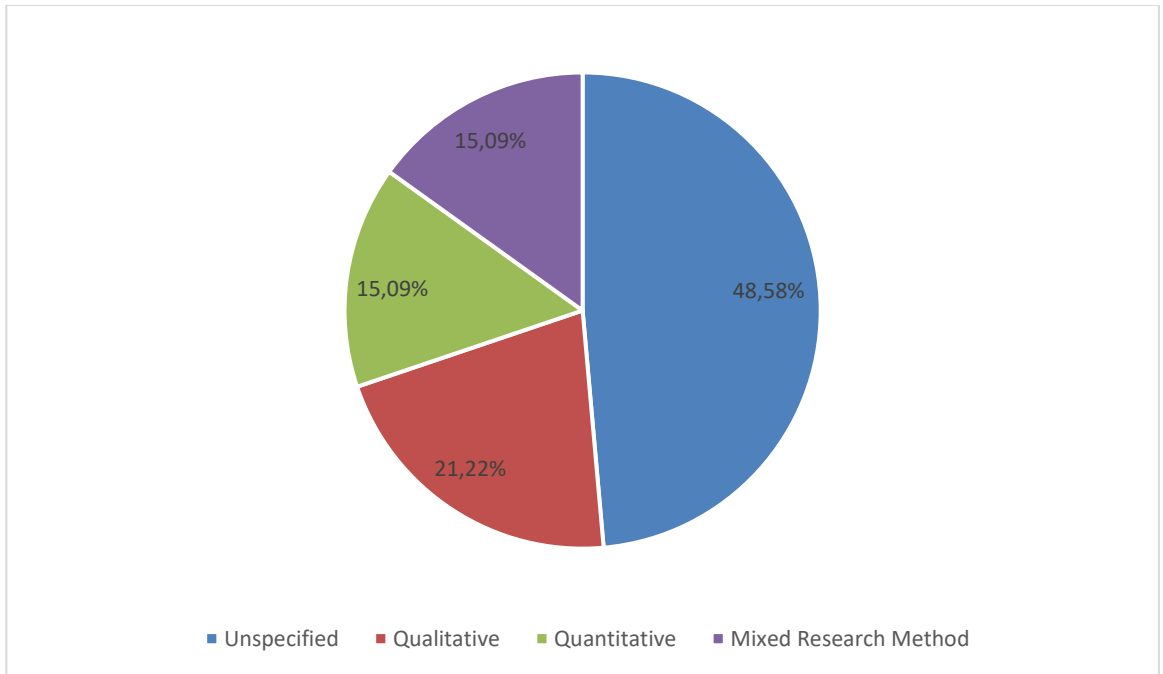


Figure 6 Research methods used in postgraduate theses

Upon examining Figure 6, it can be shown that postgraduate theses are conducted using three research methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. %21.22 of the theses were prepared using qualitative research method, and 45 theses were published using this research method. %15.09 of the published theses have been comprised of quantitative research methods. A total of 32 theses have been published using the nitel research method. 15.09% of the theses are comprised of theses conducted by the mixed research method. A total of 32 different research methods were employed in the study. It has been determined that 48.58% of the published theses do not specify the research methods. What is noteworthy is that the majority of the theses included in this study, specifically 103 theses, do not specify the research methods.

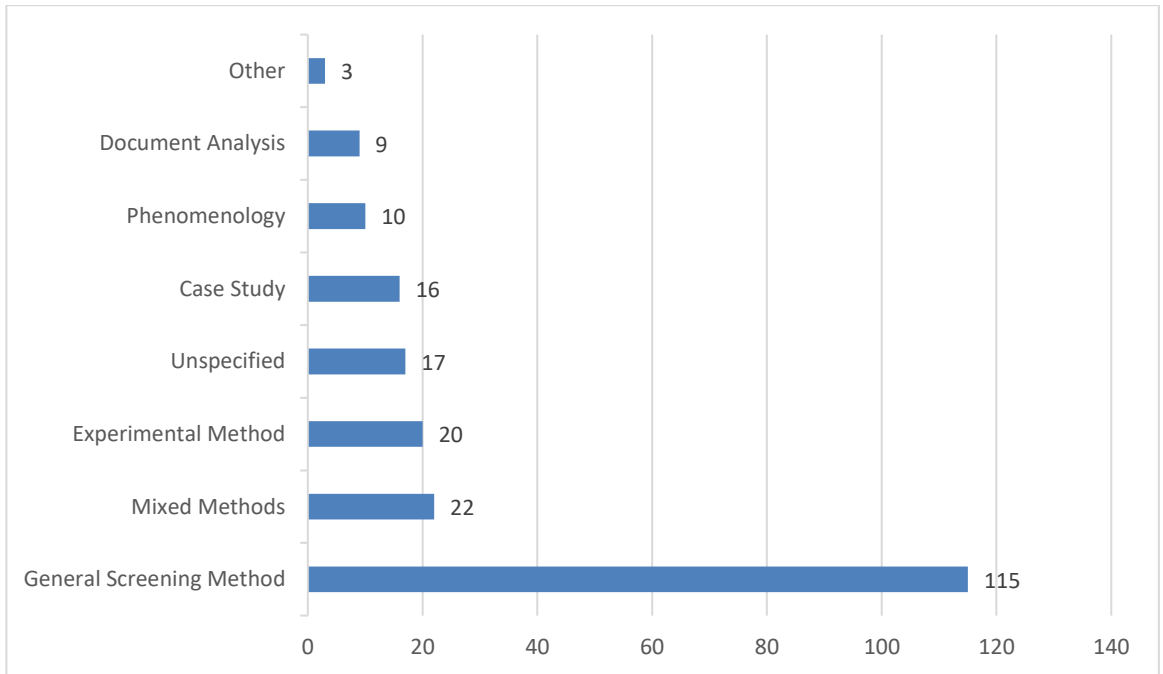


Figure 7 Research models used in graduate theses

Upon examining Figure 7, it was determined that in the postgraduate theses conducted between 2013 and 2023, general scanning models were used in 115 theses (54.24%). It is noteworthy that more than half of the included theses in the study utilized general scanning models. The conclusion has been reached that 22 theses (%10.37) utilized research models on karma. Experimental models were preferred at a rate of 9.43%, case studies at 7.54%, phenomenology at 4.71%, and document analysis technique at 4.4%. The techniques of discourse analysis, action research, and picture drawing were identified as being used only once and were grouped under the category of 'Other'. It has been determined that 17 (8.01%) of the postgraduate theses did not specify the research model.

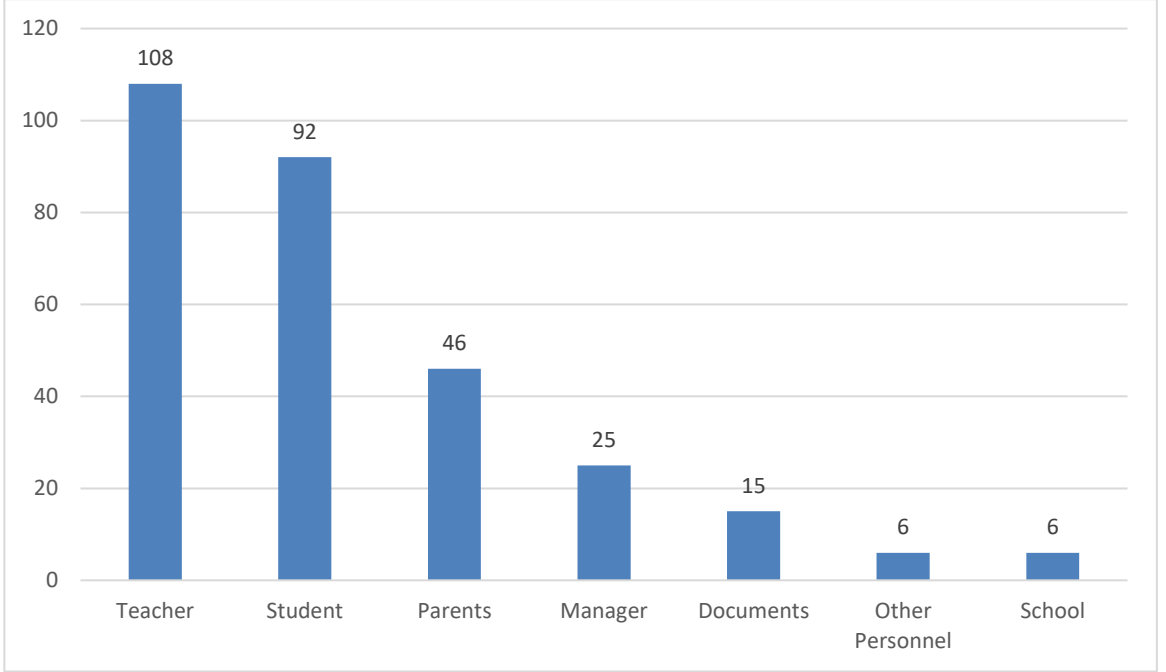


Figure 8 illustrates the distribution of postgraduate theses according to study groups.

Upon examining Figure 8, it is noteworthy that out of the total of 108 postgraduate theses conducted in the field of Early Childhood Education between 2013 and 2023, 50.94% of them focused on teachers. A total of 92 theses (43.39%) included students, 46 theses (21.69%) included parents, and 25 theses (11.79%) included administrators. We have accessed 15 theses (7.07%) that are preferred as documents by the working group. Tespit edilmiştir ki, 6 (%2.83) tezde diğer personeller ve 6 (%2.83) tezde okullar dahil edilmiştir.

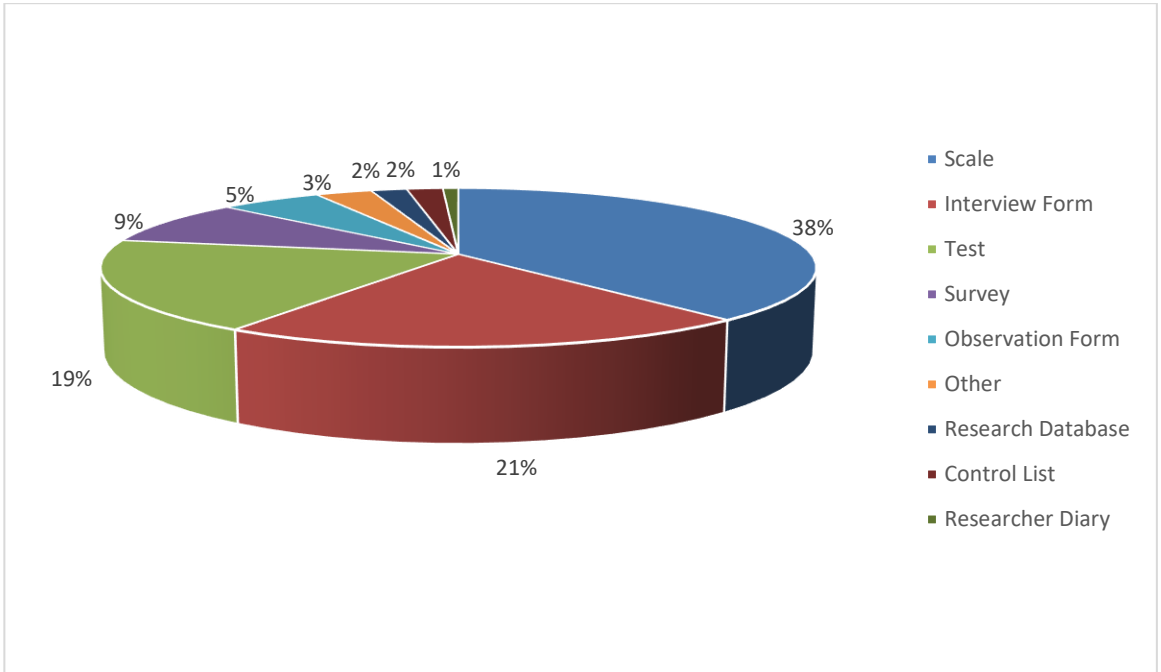


Figure 9 illustrates the distribution of postgraduate theses according to data collection techniques.

When examining Figure 9, it can be observed that the scale was used as a data collection tool in 38% of the 212 postgraduate theses conducted between 2013 and 2023. The second most preferred option, with a rate of 21%, is the use of a questionnaire as a means of communication. The preference rate of the tests has been determined at 19%. The survey was found to be used at a rate of 9%, the form at a rate of 7%, and the observation form at a rate of 5%. It has been determined that other data collection tools (such as drawing, software, script, book, photo, and video recordings) are utilized at a rate of 3%. According to the determined data, the usage rate of the research database has been identified as 2%. According to the findings, the checklist was preferred at a rate of 2%, while the researcher's diary was the least preferred, with a rate of 1%.

3.7. How is the distribution of the number of problems, number of results and number of recommendations in open access graduate theses published in the field of preschool education between 2013-2023?

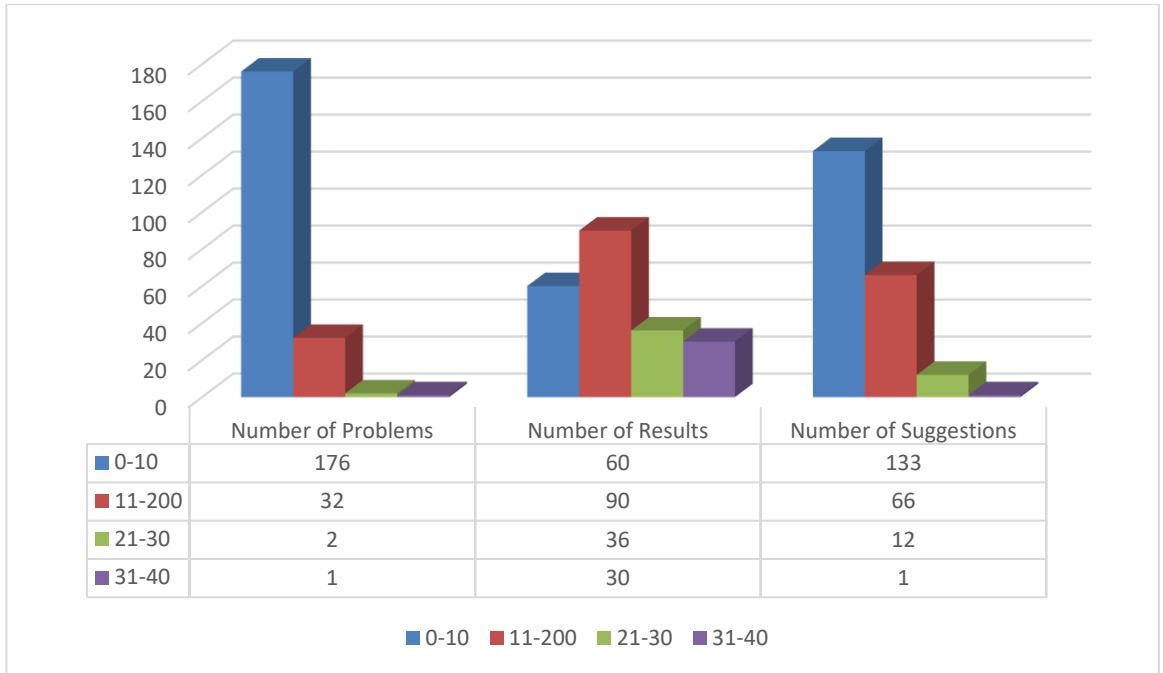


Figure 10 The distribution of the number of problems, results, and recommendations in the postgraduate theses

Upon examining Figure 10, it can be shown that the number of research problems in postgraduate theses conducted between 2013 and 2023 varied between 0 and 40. The number of research problems varied between 0-10 in 176 (83.01%) theses, whereas it was found to range between 11-20 in 32 (15.09%) theses. The number of obtained results is 90 (42.45%), with a concentration between 11 and 20 in the thesis. The results are also distributed as follows: 60 (28.30%) theses scored between 0-10, 36 (16.98%) theses scored between 21-30, and 21 (9.90%) theses scored between 31-40. The number of recommendations in postgraduate theses has varied between 0 to 30. When examining the numbers of recommendations, it is observed that 133 (62.73%) theses have a number of recommendations between 0-10, whereas 66 (31.13%) theses have a number of recommendations between 11-20. Furthermore, there are 12 (%5.66) theses ranging from 21 to 30 in number. In the 31-40 range, there is one thesis with the highest number of suggestions (0.47%).

3.8. What is the distribution of focus areas in open access postgraduate theses published in the field of early childhood education between 2013 and 2023?

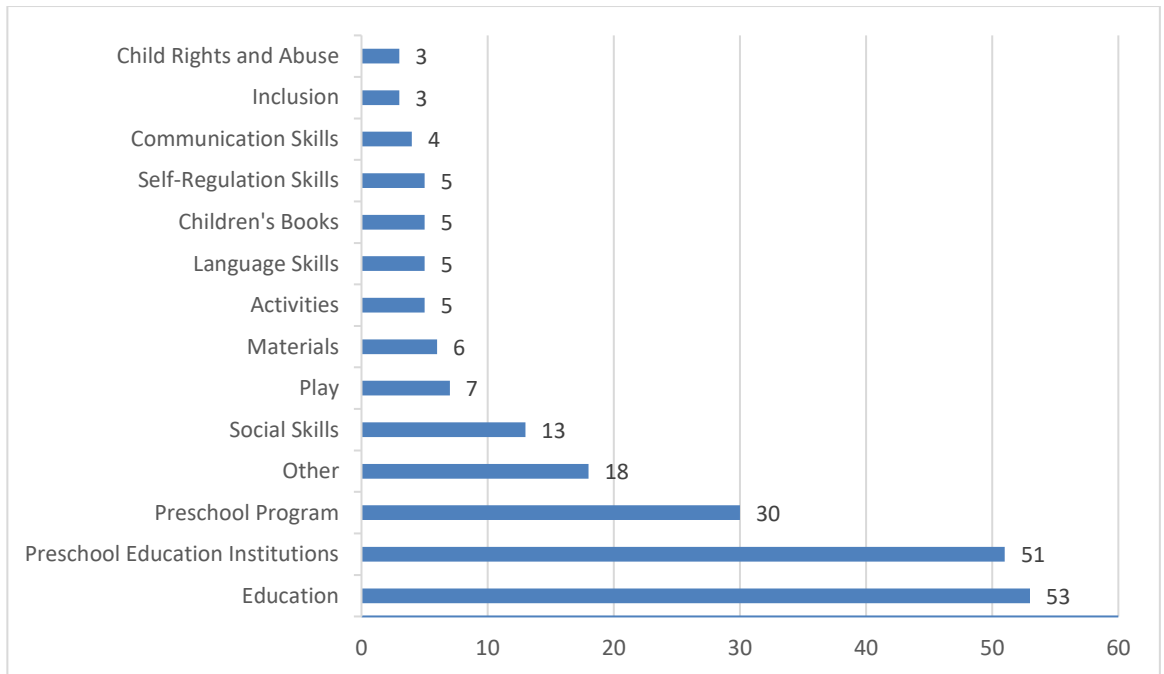


Figure 11 Illustrates the distribution of the focal points of postgraduate theses

In Figure 11, the main focal points of the selected theses, published between 2013 and 2023, have been categorized into 14 sub-themes based on specific criteria. The categories are determined as "Education", "Preschool Education Institutions", "Preschool Program", "Social Skills", "Play", "Materials", "Activities", "Language Skills", "Children's Books", "Self-Regulation Skills", "Communication Skills", "Inclusion", "Child Rights and Abuse", and "Other". The conclusion has been reached that the most frequently coded theme is "Education". It has been determined that this theme is addressed in 53 (25%) theses. The least addressed themes are "Child Rights and Abuse" in 3 theses (1.41%) and "Inclusion" in 3 theses (1.41%).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It is expected that the analysis of the theses conducted in the field of Early Childhood Education in Turkey between 2013-2023 will contribute to the relevant literature by identifying the focal points of recent studies. It has been concluded that the 212 theses primarily consist of master's theses in this context. It is noteworthy that there is a limited number of doctoral theses in the field of Early Childhood Education. Between the years 2018 and 2019, there has been an increase in the number of theses published based on specific criteria. The year 2019 has been identified as the year with the highest increase between 2013 and 2023. Şahin and Bartan (2017) have observed an increasing trend in postgraduate theses conducted in Turkey between 2011 and 2012. It is believed that the significant decrease in the number of theses published after 2019 is due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the world and the ongoing restrictions during the pandemic. Researchers can contribute to the literature by examining the effects of COVID-19 in the field of Preschool Education according to different variables.

An analysis of the gender distribution of authors and advisors of the theses published in the field of Early Childhood Education between 2013 and 2023 reveals that the majority of authors are women. An important disparity has emerged in the gender distribution of authors and consultants. According to the findings, the number of female writers is approximately six times higher than the number of male writers. Considering that academic advisors conducting postgraduate theses are academics, it can be said that the number of male academics is lower than that of female academics. The main reasons for these differences in the gender distribution of researchers and counselors in the field of Preschool Education can be examined in future studies with researchers and counselors.

An analysis of the distribution of postgraduate theses reveals that they are predominantly concentrated in the Marmara and Central Anatolia regions. When the findings were examined, it was determined that the least number of theses were published in the Eastern Anatolia and Southeast Anatolia regions. It can be assumed that more effort is being made in the context of having a higher number of universities in the Marmara and Central Anatolia regions. By examining the differences in regional distributions, training needs can be identified for regions with fewer studies. The educational status of the regions, educational opportunities, educational needs and the reasons why fewer studies are conducted can be the subject of another research.

When considering institutions, it can be concluded that the distribution of postgraduate theses is predominantly carried out in the Institute of Educational Sciences. Research findings indicate that the number of theses published in the Institute of Educational Sciences is approximately twice as high as the number of theses published in the Institute of Social Sciences. It has been concluded that the included postgraduate theses were conducted at least in the Graduate Education Institute. The execution of social science theses takes place at the Institute of Social Sciences, whereas the execution of theses in the field of education and the majority of research theses are considered a significant difference, mostly conducted at the Institute of Education Sciences. When examining the distribution of postgraduate theses according to the departments, it was found that the highest number of publications were in the Department of Elementary Education. The number of theses published within the scope of the Department of Educational Sciences and the Department of Primary Education is found to be rather similar to each other. According to the distribution of postgraduate theses according to departments, the tendency of students to focus on the field of Preschool Education, the reasons for their preference and the studies carried out by the departments in the field of Preschool Education can be examined from different perspectives. variables.

In postgraduate theses, research methods used can be categorized into three main headings: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. It has been determined that 103 out of the 212 theses examined in the scope of the study did not

specify the research methods. The most commonly used research method in postgraduate theses is found to be qualitative method. In his study conducted in 2013, Ahi ve Kildan observed that quantitative research methods were more commonly utilized in postgraduate theses on Early Childhood Education conducted between 2002 and 2011. When the findings were examined, it was determined that the least used research method is the mixed research method. It has been determined that general scanning models were used in more than half of the 212 theses conducted between 2013 and 2023. The included theses encompass various research models such as mixed methods, experimental methods, case studies, phenomenology, and document analysis. In 17 theses, it was determined that research models were not specified. By increasing studies on the least preferred mixed research method, more contributions to the field can be made with more in-depth, scientific and reliable data.

In the studies examined, the study groups were identified as teachers, students, parents, administrators, documents, other personnel and schools. It is noteworthy that in the majority of the theses, teachers are preferred as the working group. It is important that students and teachers participate intensively in the work together. It is believed that there is a focus on working with teachers in the assessment and inclusion of preschool children, as well as the use of tools primarily by teachers in research due to their lack of literacy skills. Increasing studies in which students take a more active role can contribute to the field by obtaining more qualified data about students.

Graduate theses commonly prefer scale data collection tools. Şahin and Bartan (2017) have said that a large majority of studies have utilized scales and, in addition, data has been collected through interviews. The scale has been followed by interview form, test, questionnaire, and observation form. The research database, checklist, and researcher's journal have been identified as the least preferred data collection tools. Researchers have utilized various data collection tools such as drawing, software, scripts, books, photographs, and video recordings. It is noteworthy that multiple data collection tools are used together in the examined postgraduate theses. Data collection tools are thought to be used more frequently in research to collect data more accurately.

The conclusion reached is that the number of problems in postgraduate theses varies between 0 and 40. When examining the findings, it is noteworthy that more than half of the theses included in the study are related to the number of problems between 0 and 10. Upon examination of the numerical data, it has been shown that there is a higher concentration of results between 11 and 20 in the theses. It is noteworthy that the number of recommendations between 0 and 10 is higher. The quality of the research can be increased if the number of suggestions is written according to the research questions and the findings obtained.

The main focus areas of postgraduate theses are grouped under 14 sub-themes, namely 'Education', 'Preschool Education Institutions', 'Preschool Program', 'Social Skills', 'Play', 'Materials', 'Activities', 'Language Skills', 'Children's Books', 'Self-Regulation Skills', 'Communication Skills', 'Inclusion', 'Child Rights and Abuse', and 'Others'. The most often coded themes were identified as "Education" and "Preschool Institutions". It is worth noting that the least emphasized themes are "Child Rights and Abuse" and "Inclusion". In-depth information can be obtained by examining the least used themes in terms of different variables such as teacher, student, and educational program.

Teachers and students have been predominantly preferred as working groups in research papers. There is room for further research on the preschool education program and academics. Qualitative and quantitative research methods have been frequently used in postgraduate theses. The number of theses conducted using mixed research methods can be increased. Graduate and doctoral theses can be compared by evaluating them based on several criteria. Postgraduate theses can be examined based on several publication years criteria.

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