

International Conference on Education and Educational Psychology (ICEEPSY 2010)

## Investigating the National Dissertation and Thesis Database in the Field of Early Childhood Education in Turkey

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### Abstract

The importance of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Turkey is growing and research into ECE is necessary for the development of a solid knowledge bank on which to base educational and training programs. In this study 410 dissertations and theses from the National Dissertation and Thesis database were analyzed in terms of variables including publication years, universities and departments. The outcome that ECE research in Turkey has increased, but many ECE areas have been neglected. It is hoped that future research will explore these areas and this will contribute to a greater understanding of needs and requirements of ECE programs.

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Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of Dr. Zafer Bekirogullari of Y.B.

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Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Theses and Dissertations, Turkey.

### 1. Introduction

When the history of early childhood education in Turkey is investigated, it can be seen that, although there were some institutions providing a kind of education for young children in the Ottoman Empire period (Ural & Ramazan, 2007), only after the 1990's, that the investments required for the standardized institutional development in early childhood education (ECE) were begun (Bekman, 2005). After the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, with the reformation of the Turkish language script in 1928, the development of primary education was seen as more important than ECE. Therefore, the responsibility for ECE was in the hands of families and local governments (Oktay, 1983). Furthermore, the preschool budget was transferred to fund primary schooling and kindergarten's were closed (Ergin, 1977). The only institutions for preschool care that remained open were those provided for poor working mothers (Oktay, 1983).

The National Educational Boards had an important role in the development of ECE in Turkey in terms of developing ECE program across country. Their work included; determining aims, goals, and objectives and also providing training for the personnel of the institutions. During the time of the first three boards, ECE did not exist (Tekişik, 1995) however, ECE appeared in 1949, and the 4<sup>th</sup> National Educational Board was formed to develop family education. Beginning with the 4<sup>th</sup> board, ECE became important (Ural & Ramazan, 2007). In addition to the Educational Boards ECE was mentioned for the first time in the second Turkish five year Development Plan for the

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period 1968- 1972. As Ural and Ramazan, (2007) comment, after the second plan ECE was mentioned in nearly all the successive plans however, although different models were applied the projected level for ECE was not reached until the most recent development plan.

In parallel with the developments in the area of ECE, the training of early childhood education teachers in Turkey has a long history. After the establishment of Turkish Republic in 1927, the first *Ana Öğretmen Anaokulu* was established in Ankara (Ural & Ramazan, 2007). However, after two years, with the priority given to primary education, in 1930 the school was closed (Oğuzkan, 1982, Öztürk, 2001) and the issue of ECE teacher training arises again until 1960 with the rise of urbanization and women's participation in the workforce. In the Primary and Education Legislation specified certain principles on which teacher training was to be based (Ural & Ramazan, 2007). According to the legislation only graduates of the teacher training schools or graduates of an equivalent kind of education from the foreign countries, graduates of lycees (high schools) or girl's educational institutions after successfully completing a program of seminars can be kindergarten teachers. Thus, the process of standardization and institutionalization in the training of ECE teachers had begun.

In keeping with the legislation, in the 1963- 1964 academic year "Child Development and Care" departments in the girls' occupational lycees were opened. With the "Basic Law of National Education" the responsibility for training ECE teachers was transferred to the higher education institutions. In 1979, a two year "Kindergarten teacher associate degree program" was designed and was first implemented in the 1980- 1981 academic year. Then in the 1991 – 1992 academic year a 4 year undergraduate program was initiated (Oktay, 1999). For many years the training of teachers and educators in the field of ECE was undertaken by child development and education departments. Since there were only a small number of students enrolling in ECE programs there were no special unit for the training of teachers and educators in the field. Finally in 1998 the Council for Higher Education (YÖK) decided to increase the number of departments that offer teacher training (Bekman, 2005) and these departments were to be called Early Childhood Education. After the work of the Turkish Council of Higher Education in structuring the education faculties, from the beginning of 1998, Early Childhood Education programs operated under the auspices of the Elementary Education departments (Ural & Ramazan, 2007).

By the year 2007, there were Early Childhood Education departments that provide both undergraduate and graduate programs for the development of academicians and the training of the teachers in the field. (Ural & Ramazan, 2007). As Haktanır (2007) stated, there were a total of 44 faculties (41 education, 2 occupational education, and 1 Open Education) that had 57 Early Childhood Education/ Kindergarten Education department with undergraduate programs. ECE as an academic discipline began in the early 1990's following the inclusion of ECE departments in Education Faculties and 1993 saw the start of graduate programs in ECE, however, even as early as 1987 it is possible to find master theses related to ECE from those studying in departments such as Child Development and Psychology.

### **1.1. Importance of Investigating Dissertations and Theses**

As Jin (2004) stressed, theses and dissertations have great importance not only due to their role in building the foundation of academic graduate studies but can also be considered to demonstrate the amount of research that has been conducted over time. Furthermore, dissertations and theses contain valuable information from academicians and experts in the field that serves to enrich both the process and product (Jin, 2004). The role of the academic advisor in the process of thesis and dissertation writing is important in guiding the student to gain knowledge specific to the area of study and the assisting in the production of end product which is of benefit to those involved in the field of education and teaching. Specifically, doctoral dissertations can be considered as forming the bases of higher education which in turn create researchers contributing to the profession. Those academic studies have not only a power of encouraging new studies by contributing the process of ongoing higher education, but also promoting social, economic and educational status of the society from which they emanate (Vijayakumar & Vijayakumar, 2007).

Today the majority of universities not only store master's thesis and doctoral dissertations in an electronic form but also make them available through a digital platform (Goodfellow, 2009). This turning point in the academic world from the storage of paper copies within the educational institution to accessible electronic versions (Copeland,

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