



Art in Early Childhood Period: Experiences and Effects*

Erken Çocukluk Döneminde Sanat: Deneyimler ve Etkiler

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ABSTRACT: Art education, which contributes to a wide range of activities from supporting children's fine motor development to increasing aesthetic sensitivity, is a basic learning area that supports children's creativity and strengthens their sensory and cognitive development in the preschool period. The purpose of the research is to create a roadmap for educators engaged in art activities with children from an early age on how these activities can be conducted more effectively for the benefit of children. The study uses a qualitative design, employing phenomenology. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with two participants engaged in art activities with children, using a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher and refined based on expert opinions. Descriptive analysis was conducted, and codes and themes were generated from the results. The findings were presented under the themes of: (1) the definition and function of art, (2) the implementation process with children, (3) its contribution to the children's development and learning, (4) evaluation process, and (5) recommendations for practitioners. According to the results obtained from the research, it is emphasized that artistic activities in early childhood should be planned according to the interests, needs, and desires of children.

Keywords: Early childhood education, art, art education, phenomenology.

ÖZ: Çocukların küçük kas gelişimini desteklemekten estetik duyarlılığı artırmaya kadar geniş bir yelpazede katkı sağlayan sanat eğitimi, okul öncesi dönemde çocukların yaratıcılığını destekleyen, duyuşal ve bilişsel gelişimlerini güçlendiren temel bir öğrenme alanıdır. Araştırmanın amacı; erken yaşlardan itibaren çocuklarla sanat çalışması yapan eğitimcilere bu çalışmaların nasıl ve ne şekilde daha verimli ve çocukların yararına yapılabileceğine dair bir yol haritası oluşturmaktır. Araştırmada nitel desenlerden olgubilim kullanılmıştır. Verilerin toplanmasında araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilip uzman görüşleri doğrultusunda son hali verilen yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formundan yararlanılarak çocuklarla sanat çalışmaları yapan iki katılımcı ile derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Yapılan betimsel analiz sonucu kod ve temalar oluşturulmuştur. Elde edilen bulgular küçük yaş grubu çocuklarla sanat çalışmaları yürüten katılımcıların sürece dair deneyimlerine yönelik: (1) sanatın tanımı ve işlevi, (2) çocuklarla uygulama süreci, (3) çocukların gelişim ve öğrenmesine katkısı (4) sanat çalışmalarını değerlendirme ve (5) uygulayıcılara öneriler temaları altında sunulmuştur. Araştırmadan elde edilen sonuçlara göre erken çocukluk döneminde sanatsal etkinliklerin çocukların ilgi, ihtiyaç ve isteklerine göre planlanması gerektiği vurgulanmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Erken çocukluk eğitimi, sanat, sanat eğitimi, olgubilim.

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Art is an important field that affects the holistic development of children and one of the aims of early childhood education is to enhance children's creativity. In this context, art education programs play a crucial role. Art is one of the most effective ways for individuals to express their emotions and thoughts. Art education installs skills such as critical thinking, creativity, imagination, problem-solving, and hand-eye coordination in children from an early age. However, effective art education requires more than just organizing programs and spaces; it also necessitates teachers to have the necessary knowledge and resources for this purpose (Özkan & Girgin, 2014). Art educators need to have a solid understanding of children's developmental and learning characteristics while cultivating an individual towards a specific purpose. Childhood is one of the periods during which an individual undergoes rapid changes. In this process, a child not only changes physically and emotionally but also undergoes transformations through the acquisition of new values and concepts. The teacher's role is to lead this process and contribute to the child's development through suitable activities. Preschool teachers and teacher candidates must possess adequate knowledge and skills in planning and implementing activities that allow children to enjoy art. It is essential for them to create activities that contribute to the child's development (Gönen, 2016). Research indicates that at an early age, children express themselves in various ways through visual art activities, supporting the development of visual and critical thinking as well as the refinement of aesthetic sensibilities (Duran & Taştekin, 2020; Inomjonovna & Xolmirzayevna, 2023).

An art educator should possess sufficient knowledge about a child's life, behavior, sensory experiences, their interaction, and how they are influenced by the environment and society (San, 1977; York, 2014). The correct and effective way to achieve the goal is to have a good understanding of the artistic development process that emerges during the growth and development of personality. Educators should be well aware of which developmental areas of children are supported by art activities, prepare activities based on their interests and abilities, and use different methods to ensure children enjoy the activities. Art activities should be designed to develop children's artistic perspectives and facilitate interaction among them (Arslan, 2014; Zimmerman & Zimmerman, 2000). The purpose of art activities in the preschool period is to support the child's creativity and development, and to help them gain aesthetic sensitivity and artistic perspectives (Erkut, 2016). Teachers and adults create a space for children to express their inner worlds, thoughts, and feelings freely through art activities, allowing them to get to know the child, discover their interests and talents, and assess their development. The products created by children through art can be considered as important tools providing information about the children (Arslan, 2014; Brown et al., 2018; Polat et al., 2022). Alongside art activities, many areas of a child's development are supported, and sharing knowledge and experiences of experts working in this field is of great importance for educators working with preschool children, teacher candidates, and parents alike.

Art education holds great significance in the intellectual, sensory, and kinetic development of children. The activities, methods, and techniques used in art education, as well as the frequency of participation, are crucial in promoting a child's development and achieving the goals of the practices (Özkan & Girgin, 2014). It is a known fact that creativity is intertwined with art education. Through art education, individuals are encouraged to become creative, self-confident, productive, and to develop aesthetic feelings, contributing to the formation of a civilized society (Artut, 2013; Leung et al., 2023; Rudolph & Wright, 2015). Creating creative environments is of paramount importance in fostering the creativity of children at an early age (Bell, 1997; Curriculum

Development Council, 2017; Leung et al., 2025). Art education enhances cognitive processing activities, thereby improving thinking abilities. Individuals who can think and solve problems possess the skills to adapt to life and evaluate problems from an aesthetic perspective. It is widely acknowledged that art education plays a crucial role in the education of contemporary individuals through all art education activities (Artut, 2013).

Literature reveals that research studies on art activities focus on the aesthetic value and creativity, hand-eye coordination (Kandır et al., 2016; Karabay & Geçen, 2022; Öztürk Yılmaztekin & Erden, 2017); the impact of art activities on different developmental areas of children (Alayrac et al., 2022; Ayaydın, 2010; Dağal & Şallı, 2014; Eraslan Taşpınar, 2016; Karabay, 2021; Karabay & Geçen, 2022; Korkmaz, 2020); the influence on teaching concepts and concept development (Kandır et al., 2016; Koster, 2012; Novaković, 2015); and the methods and techniques used in the art education process (Eckhoff, 2013; Ramli & Musa, 2020). Art education in early childhood plays a fundamental role in fostering children's cognitive, emotional, and motor development while encouraging self-expression and creativity. However, existing researches predominantly focus on the impact of art activities on aesthetic appreciation, creativity, and developmental skills (Duran & Taştekin, 2020; Kandır et al., 2016; Karabay & Geçen, 2022). While these researches highlight the benefits of art education, there is a gap in the literature regarding the practical guidance needed by educators and practitioners to conduct art activities effectively and in alignment with children's needs and interests. This research aims to address this gap by providing a roadmap for educators engaging in early childhood art activities how these activities can be conducted more effectively for the benefit of children. Unlike previous researches, which primarily examine outcomes and theoretical perspectives, this research offers practical insights derived from the lived experiences of art educators. By exploring educators' approaches to implementation, evaluation, and adaptation of art activities, this research contributes a practitioner-focused perspective that bridges theoretical knowledge with real-world applications. In this context, the aim of the research is to create a roadmap for adults engaging in art activities with children from early ages, outlining how these activities can be more efficient and beneficial for the young children. Additionally, it provides recommendations for teacher training programs, ensuring that prospective educators are equipped with the necessary skills and understanding to facilitate meaningful artistic experiences for young children. Research question and sub-questions are below:

- What are the implementations and experiences of art practitioners who work with young children?
 - What do art practitioners conduct through the implementation and evaluation process?
 - What are the contributions to the children's development and learning?
 - What do art practitioners recommend for educators?

Method

Research Design

The phenomenological research, one of the qualitative research methods, is a qualitative research method design in which the views of those who experience the phenomenon are taken in order to obtain information about the phenomenon (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Therefore, the aim of the research is not to generalize the universe, but to understand and explain the characteristics of the person, community or situation. The phenomenological model, one of the qualitative research models, focuses on the meanings created by an individual as a result of experiencing a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2021). In this research, the phenomenological design was preferred since it was aimed to reveal the experiences of practitioners who graduated from Faculty of Fine Arts, and have been doing art activities with preschool children for a long time. Therefore, the research aims to explore people's experiences of a phenomenon and is seen as an appropriate method to realize the goal of this research.

Participants

The research data were collected from art practitioners who conduct art activities/works with preschool children. Purposive sampling method was used in the selection of the participants, and for this purpose, two people who were engaged in and continuing art activities with children at least three years were selected among the volunteers. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to explain the facts, events and situations that are thought to have rich data by studying them in depth (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The researcher specifically reached out to practitioners who organize art workshops/activities with children and explained the purpose of the research. Only two of the practitioners responded that they would like to take part in the research. Both participants are women and one of them graduated from the undergraduate program of the Department of Art Teaching, Sculpture (Modigliani) and the other from the graduate program of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Sculpture (Fahrelnisa Zeid). Throughout the research, the participants will be referred to by their nicknames Modigliani and Fahrelnisa Zeid, and will be named as such in direct quotations due to participant confidentiality. Unlike the full-time teachers of the children, the participants go to early education institutions on certain days of the week to carry out art activities with the children. The institutions where the participants work have an alternative approach and are located in Kocaeli and Izmir provinces. One of the participants has been working with children in a school for two years while conducting art activities for six years, and the other has been working with children in a school for five years. The preschool children they work with in these institutions are between the ages of three and six.

Research Instruments and Procedures

A semi-structured interview form was used for the purpose of the research (Merriam, 2013). In the semi-structured interview technique used, the researcher has the freedom to ask additional questions during the interview to get more detailed information about the subject. The data for this research were collected using a semi-structured interview form, which was carefully designed by the researcher to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the research topic in the light of literature review. To

enhance the validity and relevance of the questions, the initial version of the interview form was reviewed by two experts in the field of preschool education, and necessary revisions were made based on their feedback before finalization. The interview form consisted of 11 open-ended questions that aimed to gather detailed information from participants. These questions covered various aspects, including the participants' demographic characteristics, their professional background and questions were asked about how they planned art activities, which outcomes they focused on, what they did in the process, and what kind of method they followed in the evaluation process, whether they included exhibitions, and their recommendations for educators who want to implement art activities. This structured yet flexible format allowed participants to express their perspectives in depth while ensuring consistency across interviews.

Data Collection Procedure

First of all, announcements were made on social media in accordance with the aim of the research and it was stated that educators who conduct art workshops with children would be interviewed. In particular, it was stated that they should be graduates of the Faculty of Fine Arts who specifically conduct art activities and have been working with preschool children for at least three years. Two participants who responded to this announcement were interviewed online after their written consent was obtained. Data was collected by two participants between April-June 2021 via online platforms. Interviews were recorded and they took 85 minutes totally.

Data Analysis

The information collected after the interviews was analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis. The aim of descriptive analysis is to reach concepts and relationships that can define the information obtained. In descriptive analysis, the stages of coding and classifying the data included: (a) bracketing or setting aside researchers' experiences to highlight participants' experiences; (b) collecting data from participants who experienced the phenomenon; (c) conducting systematic data analysis, moving from narrow to broader units of analysis; and (d) creating an overarching essence of what and how participants experienced the phenomenon (i.e., textural and structural descriptions) (Creswell, 2013; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). This step in the analysis process is to arrange the data according to codes, categories, and topics. Furthermore, interpreting the collected data, clarifying the relationships between findings, establishing cause-and-effect relationships, drawing conclusions from the findings, and stating the significance of the obtained results are in the final step of the analysis process. Descriptive analysis has a systematic structure, but since it has a flexible structure, researchers can perform data analysis according to different steps (Çetin, 2016). Data obtained were transcribed, and then read repeatedly to reveal codes and themes. In this process, a second researcher read the data to reveal codes and themes. The codes and themes obtained were supported by direct quotations from the participants.

Ethical Procedures and Reliability

This research was conducted with the permission of Aksaray University Human Research Ethics Committee with protocol number 2021/01-81 and dated 22.02.2021.

After the participants agreed to participate in the research, they were sent a consent form and asked to sign it. Before starting the online interviews, they were informed that interviews would be recorded and were started after their verbal consent.

The research used a variety of techniques to ensure validity and reliability. First, the researcher was in charge of carrying out the research during the data gathering stage. This researcher has led and conducted qualitative interviews before. The researcher put aside personal prejudices and experiences throughout the research to concentrate only on the experiences of the participants. Methods like interacting with the data for an extended period of time, getting participant comments, using participant statements exactly as they were, and reviewing notes and audio recordings were used. Procedures were also followed, including giving participants clear information about the research, protecting their privacy, and getting their permission to record audio. Each participant's remarks throughout the semi-structured online interviews were meticulously recorded and accurately transcribed. Following the transcription of the data, the interviews were examined by a different researcher also. Together, the two researchers examined two interviews to find codes, subthemes, and quotes.

Results

The themes that emerged from the data obtained as a result of the participants' answers to the semi-structured interview questions are presented under headings. The themes that emerged regarding the experiences of the participants who carried out art activities with young children in early childhood: (1) the definition and function of art, (2) the implementation process with children, (3) its contribution to the children's development and learning, (4) evaluation process, and (5) recommendations for practitioners. The participants emphasized that children are active in the process of working with children, that they direct the process in line with their own interests, and that the learning process is continuous and brings renewal when working with children.

Table 1

Themes and Codes on the Definition and Function of Art

Theme	Code
Definition of Art	Self-expression
	Reflecting emotion
The Function of Art	Giving the child a space for self-expression

The participants defined art as self-expression, reflecting their feelings more easily, and one of the participants stated that the function of art, especially when working with young children, offered them the opportunity to express themselves easily through any branch of art. Quotations from the participants' views on the definition of art are as follows:

It's the best way to get things off our chest. Even if the things inside us are bad. It is the best way to reflect and pour them out. So even the worst emotion, when you pour it out through art, something beautiful comes out. And art is like talking for me. I'm not a person who can write or speak much... Art is definitely a way of expression. (Modigliani)

It is a way of expressing oneself. This varies according to each person. Some express themselves by speaking, some by writing, some by making art... (Fahrelnisa Zeid)

It can be difficult for children to express themselves at an early age due to their development. However, at this point, art and different branches of art can enable young children to express themselves more easily through any branch of art. One of the participants related to this theme stated that '...every child is different. Some express themselves by drawing, some by doing things. Some express themselves through play, some express themselves through movement, some express themselves through dance, some express themselves through their voice, some express themselves through music. You can observe this very easily, in fact, you see that every child finds a branch of art to express themselves' (Fahrelnisa Zeid).

Table 2

Themes and Codes Related to the Implementation Process with Children

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Subtheme</i>	<i>Codes</i>
<i>Implementation Process</i>	Learning experience	Discovering
		Creativity
		Interest and curiosity
		Questioning
		Flexible
	Processing	Different art forms
		Different methods and techniques
		Utilizing various materials

Participants who carried out art activities with the children stated that children used exploration, creativity and questioning and that the process was flexible and could be changed in line with children's interests and curiosities because it was flexible. The opinion of one of the participants on this issue is as follows:

...how should I put it, because they do it by going into it, by questioning it, by asking questions, for example, if you are studying a painter, if you are examining a painter, they question a lot. I mean, they see images in that painting that you can't see and ask questions. (Modigliani)

Again, the participants emphasized that they benefited from different visual art fields such as painting, ceramics and sculpture in the process, that they used different methods and techniques during the application, that they provided a variety of materials in line with the wishes of the children, and that the process could change instantly due to its flexibility and that the priority was always the interests and curiosity of the children. Quotations from the participants' views on the process are presented below:

They love sculpture, they love ceramic clay. Because the thing is incredible. You know, it is variable, they give it the shape they want. You know, the soil balances the energy. That's why they love to do something with it. That's why, for example, almost every two weeks we do different workshops with the same class using the same ceramic clay. Anyway, it's not like we're doing ceramics today, sculpture today, oil painting today, watercolor today. I put all the materials, let's do a work like this, let's do it with whatever technique you want, and so on.

Then they all come together, and something comes out. While making ceramics, it can also turn into something more structural. (Modigliani)

The things I pay the most attention to are what the children are interested in at that moment. We plan based on what they are interested in. Therefore, our planning, for example, is not clear beforehand... Sometimes what we prepare may not be of interest to the child. Then you need to have a plan b. Well, there are also situations where it would not be bad to have a plan c. So, you always need to be prepared. While this interest and curiosity continues, I care about this. While this interest and curiosity continues, it is important to put as much material into that interest and curiosity as possible, to develop their sensory areas, to develop their fine motors, to develop hand-eye coordination, and all of this according to what they are interested in, for example, if they are curious about animals, they put the animals on acetate paper and then draw them, they go over them. Immm we don't have them do limited coloring, we have them do these kinds of drawings on the light table. Because it is more real...Therefore, we do it according to interest and curiosity. We plan so that they can experience all the materials or according to the child's deficiencies. (Fahrelnisa Zeid)

Table 3

Themes and Codes on the Contribution to Children's Development and Learning

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Subtheme</i>	<i>Codes</i>
Contribution to Children's Development and Learning	Cognitive development	Spatial perception Perspective Attention Critical thinking Time perception
	Language development	Vocabulary
	Motor development	Fine motor development
	Sensory development	Different senses like eyesight, and sense of touch
	Social-emotional development	Cooperation Assistance Self-expression Relaxation

The participants in the research stated that art activities contribute to many developmental areas of children, and that different developmental areas are supported through art activities in which children actively participate, even when adults do not notice or do not identify them as an achievement. The sub-themes obtained from the participants' opinions include codes related to children's cognitive, language, motor, sensory and socio-emotional development areas. Participants stated that children's spatial and perspective perception improved especially through the three-dimensional works they did. In addition, the participants emphasized that children's attention, temporal perception and critical thinking skills were improved through the activities of telling about the products they made in the process and criticizing each other. The participants emphasized that they clearly experienced the seasonal transitions due to the

location of the school and that their perception of time improved by observing the changes in these transitions through the art activities they carried out in nature, and the opinion of one of the participants on this issue is as follows:

Of course, since I come from the sculpture side, I pay a lot of attention to three-dimensional activities, because it is very important for their geometry and three-dimensional perception to develop at this age. If they develop at this age, I think they will be much more comfortable in science lessons and math lessons in the future. That perception part is actually much more important. Normally perspective third grade lessons, but I mean, the child can perceive it even before primary school three. We use the forest for this. When we are sitting somewhere in the forest, we can see how small the tree looks, but when we go closer to it, it is actually very big... Our school is in a very advantageous location. We experience seasonal transitions very clearly, not like in the city. And the leaves fall from the trees in the fall and the flowers start to bloom in the spring. Since we can observe all of this very easily, it snows. Children both understand the seasons better, and by observing nature and using it in their work, they develop this perception very easily, the concept of time...Every day, after every workshop, we make imm art criticism. I try to do whatever they do together with the children, I try to raise them. Everyone criticizes each other. First of all, but one person gets up and talks about their own painting. I had difficulty with this, I couldn't do this, I discovered this, then this happened here, that happened here. (Fahrelnisa Zeid)

In addition to cognitive development, the participants stated that it had a significant impact on the child's language development, motor development, development of sensory skills and social-emotional development. The participants emphasized that their vocabulary developed with the terms used and new words related to art movements and branches during art activities, and that the three-dimensional works they made using different sized brushes, pencils and hands contributed significantly to their fine motor development. The opinion of one of the participants about the contribution of their artistic works to fine motor development is as follows:

...using brushes, we also use normal brushes a lot. We have a wide variety of brushes. Those fine motor, a child who cannot hold a pencil can start by learning to hold a brush. For example, or different paints, for example, I don't do anything, you know, for the two-year-olds who are just starting to hold them, the paints are thick so that they can hold them more comfortably, the pencils are thick. I don't think there is no need, you know, I think they can learn everything right away. They don't need to hold them straight and upright at once, but they can hold them sideways and color, they can hold them upright, it doesn't matter. I think it is also very useful for them. (Modigliani)

It was emphasized that children's sensory development was supported with various materials with different textures and surfaces used in artistic activities; again, it was emphasized that children cooperated with each other during the work done, especially in the field of large and heavy materials such as sculpture, where it is difficult to work alone, cooperation is important and children support each other at this point. It was stated that children developed self-expression skills in the process of explaining and criticizing their art products to each other and that children relieved their energy and relaxed in the process. Quotations from the opinions of the participants regarding development areas are given below:

Art adds a lot to children. Children add a lot to art anyway. I think children who paint a lot, who like to paint, are generally more harmonious, calmer, more able to express their emotions, and know how to express their emotions. This is what I have observed, you know, I have been working more with children for the last year and a half. (Modigliani)

For example, I observed that children who previously had a lot of aggression problems found a space to express themselves after coming to the art workshop and that they were calmer

because they were able to express themselves and I couldn't believe it. I mean, we are not very aware that it works so well because we produce it ourselves, but when I experienced it one-on-one with the children and observed it, it affected me a lot. (Fahrelnisa Zeid)

Table 4

Themes and Codes on the Process of Evaluation

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Subtheme</i>	<i>Codes</i>
Evaluation Process	Evaluation	Art board
		Criticism system
	Labelling	Writing the child's name
		The child's own writing
		Date specification
	Exhibition	Documentation
		Virtual exhibition
		Use of the whole space

The participants reported that they evaluated the artworks they made with the children together; one of the participants stated that from time to time, a conflict that the children experienced in the classroom could be reflected in this process and there could be negative evaluations of each other's products, but in the workshop climate, they overcame such situations by asking the child to explain the reason for the criticism he made to his friend. Quotations from the participants' views on evaluations are given below:

We have an art committee at school. We selected certain people in each class. For example, we did a workshop. Fifteen works came out. Which of those works should we hang up? The children decide. We decide together and things like, why didn't mine get hung up? There is no such situation. Because they are chosen differently each time. I select them and take photos of the ones that are not selected and place them in that documentation. (Modigliani)

Definitely children's work should be evaluated. Because there is an illusion that parents like everything children do. Therefore, children doodle and say that it is very good. However, if they are already aware that they need to spend a lot of effort, that they need to pay attention, and that even if they pay attention, sometimes that work will not be enough, they will not say that it is a line. So, what I'm actually trying to do is, umm, of course, I'm not trying to create artists out of all of them. I'm not like that anyway, but I want them to be good art readers. Um, so the more they do it themselves, the more they value the other work. (Fahrelnisa Zeid)

The participants stated that they labelled the artistic products they made with children by asking them, and that they did not use a separate material for this purpose. They emphasized that children, especially in the five-six age group, labelled their own products after they learned how to write their own names, and if the child did not want anything to be written on his/her picture, no labelling was done. As in the whole implementation process, the participants stated that they acted at this point by consulting the views of the children. Quotation from the participants' views on labelling are as below:

I'm writing, I don't think it's a bad thing. Anyway, now, for example, five-six-year-olds write their own names. They have learned, they write it themselves. Well, I write them all, I even frame them and hang them up, they have a passe-partout, a frame. They have their names

underneath. We make frames together. You know, I think it should be written. I don't believe in that opposing view. Why shouldn't they write? They can write. They are aware of it. Of course, two-year-olds and three-year-olds may not realize this, but I write down whose picture I hang up. (Modigliani)

Obviously now this is an issue that needs to be looked at from several angles. We write on it instead of labelling it. Now to label it, you have to put a piece of paper under it and write on it. This is actually a waste of paper. You know, it is also necessary to look at it from an ecological point of view. Well, children are now so used to it that when they want to tell us something or what the picture is, they ask us to write it here. They even show it themselves; you can write here. Now write this and that about this picture, and since it is the place, they point to themselves, some of them don't ask for writing at all. Then we don't write. So, we respect that child's opinion. (Fahrelnisa Zeid)

Participants stated that they documented and exhibited the products of children's artworks to follow their development. One of the participants stated that they determined a selection committee for the exhibition and ensured a balanced distribution by including different children's products in different exhibitions, and at the end, all products were added to the children's individual portfolios. Participant even emphasized that they made the necessary plans for parents to virtually visit this exhibition, which they prepared together with the children, and that they created photographic evidence of the children's process and added them to the documentation. Similarly, the other participant stated that they took care to exhibit all the children's products, using the classroom and school walls, shelves in the classroom, and even hanging three-dimensional products from the ceiling. Quotations from the participants' views on exhibition are given below:

We evaluate them together with the children. I document them, I take some photographs of them while they are working. I believe that after children paint with children, they should not be put aside. Because they should be hung, exhibited, treated like an art gallery. (Modigliani)

Because they are all at their own level and they all make an effort to do it at their own level. That's why I think they are all very valuable works. Since our school enrolment has increased, we don't have enough space to exhibit all the works, but we still do our best in this regard. I mostly exhibit the works of looking and seeing on the walls and the sculpture works on the shelves. Sometimes I hang the sculpture works from the ceiling, they are in the air. (Fahrelnisa Zeid)

...I showed them a very big exhibition online. They liked it very much, and then, what kind of an exhibition, what kind of an attendant? What are the attendants at the exhibition, what is their job? After chatting about the exhibition preparation and the exhibition hall, I said that if you want, we can open our own exhibition. Oh, how will it be? They said how nice it would be if our families could come. I said they can't come but we can show them around, just like this online. After that, we said let's elect an exhibition committee. There are five classes. We chose an officer from each class to prevent any damage to the works. We chose a selection committee. Then we chose a committee to prepare the paintings to be hung in the exhibition and hang them with me. Now we are preparing for an exhibition at the end of the year, and we will prepare it with that committee. Then we will shoot videos with 360-degree equipment, and we will make sure that the school and parents can watch them. We will enable them to visit online. We chose everything with the children. (Modigliani)

Table 5

Themes and Codes Related to Recommendations for Practitioners

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Subtheme</i>	<i>Codes</i>
Recommendations	For the children	Free space
		Self-discovery
	For the educators	Guidance
		Avoiding directives
		Learning
		Being active

The participants' recommendations for practitioners who will conduct art activities with children were grouped under two sub-codes; for the children and for the educators, and consisted of the codes of free space and self-discovery for children, and the other codes of guidance, avoiding directive, learning and being active for the educators. They emphasized the need to organize sufficient time and environment for children to explore on their own with as little intervention as possible when working with children. Again, in terms of educators, they emphasized that they should guide children in the process by avoiding directives, decide arrangements for them to have a pleasant learning process together, and that not only children should be active in the process, but also educators should be active with children and take part in the activity as a participant. Quotations from the participants' views on the recommendations are given below:

First, it is absolutely necessary to free the child. Well, because there is too much of this yellow, this red, if this mixes with this, it will be green and so on... I think this is no different from rote memorization. I think putting it in front of the child and letting him/her discover it, letting him/her discover it constantly takes that child to an incredible place. Well, I think every intervention we will make to him as educators does nothing but blunt him in terms of art. Yes, for example, you can't tell a preschool child what perspective is, but when you show examples, when you put pictures with clear perspective in front of them, they start to draw like that by looking at them. I mean, it's such a beautiful process that maybe he doesn't do it the first time he sees it, but when he sees it for the second or third time, he spontaneously has incredible eyes. They discover and do it themselves. (Modigliani)

Children definitely do not know what we know during the practices. Therefore, it is necessary to approach them by thinking that they do not know. Secondly, you know, the attitude we will give them now will affect their whole future art life, their perspective on art. That's why I think pre-school teachers are very important, I think they are very effective. Um, this is a never-ending way of educating yourself. So, study...study will continue after university. So, I advise them to prepare for this fast pace, this fluid, fast pace. (Fahrelnisa Zeid)

I don't give any guidance at all? Of course, there are little touches and guidance, but I don't do it by interfering with their drawings or telling them about their drawings, for example. I paint with them and in the meantime, they pick up so many things that I think it is the best way of learning. As I said, I learn from them at the very beginning. They try so many different things at once, details I've never seen before, or some techniques, for example, and because we come to this age always learning things, we may have rigid ideas of 'oh, that can't happen', but you see that it can happen. So, I think the most important thing is to leave the child free and while they are experimenting, while they are learning by experimenting, I think it is necessary to have a support, a guide, someone who they can ask and get answers from whenever they want. (Modigliani)

Discussion and Conclusion

This research examined the views of art practitioners who carry out art activities with children in early childhood on how they carry out the process, how they provide guidance to children, how they support children's creativity and self-expression, and how they evaluate the resulting products, and presented a roadmap for both early childhood educators and pre-service teachers. The participants defined art as self-expression and reflecting their feelings more easily, and one of the participants stated that the function of art, especially when working with young children, is to provide them with the opportunity to express themselves easily through any branch of art. It can be difficult for children to express themselves at an early age due to their development. However, at this point, art and different branches of art can enable young children to express themselves more easily through any branch of art. Participants who carried out art practices with children stated that children used exploration, creativity and questioning, and that the process was flexible and could be changed in line with children's interests and curiosities. Again, the participants emphasised that they benefited from different visual art fields such as painting, ceramics and sculpture in the process, that they used different methods and techniques during the application, that they provided a variety of materials in line with the wishes of the children, and that the process could change instantly due to its flexibility and that the priority was always the interests and curiosity of the children. It is important to planning activities that motivate the child with a child-centred approach and creating an educational environment from different materials that children can easily access for visual art education (Aydoğdu & Ayanoğlu, 2020; Boyd & Cutcher, 2015; Ramli & Musa, 2020). Boyd and Cutcher (2015) emphasised that preschool teachers leave the child free in the choice of materials, materials and techniques in art practices, and that the child's perception of art develops through conversations about art, and that the teacher is a guide to the child in this process. Ramli and Musa (2020) stated that instead of teacher-centred art activities that are copied and imitated, studies that motivate and encourage the child with a child-centred understanding are effective in the art activity process and that art activities will support the shaping of children's minds and behaviours. The project conducted through collaboration between teachers and artists, presents an application that supports teachers in fostering a more flexible and child-centred approach during art activities with children (Teacher-Artist Partnership (TAP), 2015). Participants emphasized a process where children are actively engaged, steering it according to their own interests. They highlighted that the learning process remains continuous, bringing renewal as children collaborate.

Participants also mentioned using various materials to support children's creativity and adopting a flexible approach, offering different options for children's preferences rather than ensuring every child's participation. Particularly, the presence of flexible components in the process, allowing one group of children to engage in sculpture while providing opportunities for another group to work with clay or watercolor, is seen to enhance children's creativity, expressive forms, and motivation in rich environments. Teachers working with young children should focus on how products are made and how children feel while creating them, rather than just what is being done. The process should be designed around this purpose (Edwards & Nabors, 1993). Including various materials suitable for shaping, such as waste materials, clay,

playdough, and cut-and-paste, is crucial for enhancing the child's cognitive, emotional, psychomotor, and creative development. As in all educational processes, it is important to ensure that the artistic activity process for this age group is child-centered rather than teacher-centered (Özkan & Girgin, 2014). Children should express their creativity by working with different materials in a specially prepared environment that suits them and variety of materials is crucial (Aydoğdu & Ayanoğlu, 2020; Uysal & İnce, 2020; Zembat et al., 2020). The results of this research highlight the significance of a child-centered approach in early childhood art activities, emphasizing the importance of self-expression, creativity, and flexibility in the process. Participants underscored that art serves as a powerful medium for young children to communicate their emotions and thoughts, particularly when verbal expression is challenging. The research also revealed that providing diverse materials and methods encourages exploration, questioning, and collaboration, fostering a dynamic and engaging learning environment. Rather than focusing solely on the final product, educators should prioritize the all process, ensuring that children actively participate and make choices based on their interests. A flexible approach that integrates various artistic disciplines, from painting to sculpture, enhances children's motivation and creative development. Ultimately, early childhood art activities should be structured around the needs, curiosity, and agency of the child, allowing them to experience art as a meaningful and personal form of expression.

Participants in the research stated that art activities contribute to many developmental areas of children, supporting different developmental domains even in situations unnoticed or not identified as achievements by adults. The codes derived from the participants' views include sub-codes related to children's cognitive, language, motor, sensory, and socio-emotional development areas. Participants specifically mentioned improvement in children's spatial and perspective perception through their three-dimensional works. Through concept teaching in art activities, cognitive abilities such as color, shape, texture, contrasting concepts, focus, supporting visual memory, predicting, decision-making, matching, grouping, comparing, establishing relationships, ordering, creating patterns, and understanding the relationship between parts and wholes are acquired (Koster, 2012; Novaković, 2015). Additionally, emphasis is placed on the development of children's attention, temporal perception, and critical thinking skills through activities where they describe their products, criticize each other, and engage in critique during the process same as in the researches (Duran & Taştekin, 2020; Inomjonovna & Xolmirzayevna, 2023; Karabay & Geçen, 2022). Participants emphasized that they vividly experience seasonal transitions based on the location of the school and highlighted that through art activities in nature, they personally observe the changes during these transitions, contributing to the development of children's perception of time. In addition to cognitive development, participants mentioned the significant impact of visual art practices on the child's language development, motor development, sensory skills, and socio-emotional development.

Art activities in preschool education help children acquire skills such as sharing, cooperation, communication, adaptation, recognizing and regulating emotions, self-confidence, self-respect, and empathy by supporting their social and emotional development (Katz-Buonincontro, 2018). Simultaneously, they contribute to language development by supporting processes such as information acquisition, listening, self-expression, and enriching vocabulary, while also aiding motor development through

hand-eye coordination exercises (Alayrac et al., 2022; Ayaydın, 2010; Dağal & Şallı, 2014; Eraslan, 2016; Karabay, 2021; Karabay & Geçen, 2022; Korkmaz, 2020; San, 2010). The ability of children to respond to, engage with, and express themselves (their reactions, experiences, and personal feelings, as well as in certain situations, the emotions and viewpoints of others) through the arts will be the main emphasis of assessment in the arts curriculum. During art activities, it has been emphasized that terms related to art movements and branches are used, leading to the development of new words and vocabulary. Through the use of different-sized brushes, pens, and three-dimensional works created using their hands, children significantly contribute to the development of their fine motor skills. The use of various materials with different textures and surfaces in artistic activities supports children's sensory development. Furthermore, collaboration among children during the activities, particularly in areas where working alone with large and heavy materials such as sculptures is challenging, highlights the importance of cooperation, with children supporting each other. It has been emphasized that children express themselves and develop their skills of self-expression during the process of sharing and critiquing their art products with each other. The process also allows children to release energy and relax. The results highlight the multifaceted contributions of art activities to children's development, encompassing cognitive, language, motor, sensory, and socio-emotional domains. Through hands-on exploration, children enhance their spatial perception, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills while also developing communication abilities and emotional regulation. The integration of diverse materials and collaborative opportunities fosters creativity, cooperation, and self-expression. Ultimately, art activities serve as a powerful medium for holistic growth, providing children with meaningful opportunities to engage, learn, and express themselves in ways that traditional methods may not always facilitate.

Furthermore, participants discuss the importance of documentation and conducting the assessment process collaboratively with children. They emphasize that through documentation, children have the opportunity to clearly see their own development and changes. In a positive classroom climate, children provide feedback on each other's products, and an art exhibition environment is created to allow them to experience different perspectives. By using a performance-based assessment strategy, children are encouraged to show that they comprehend and can apply the content they have learned through real-world tasks. Children's comprehension is then evaluated based on predetermined criteria. This method encourages children to apply critical thinking abilities like exploring, and analysing the works well for projects (Leung et al., 2025; O'Sullivan et al., 2023). Art activities carried out in all these dimensions provide an opportunity for children's holistic development and enriching learning experiences. Participants reported that they evaluate art activities together with children. One participant mentioned that occasionally, conflicts among children in the classroom may be reflected in their negative evaluations of each other's products. However, in the workshop atmosphere, they overcome such situations by asking the child providing criticism to explain the rationale behind their critique of a peer's work. The ability of children to respond to, engage with, and express themselves through their reactions, experiences, and personal feelings, the emotions and viewpoints of others throughout the arts will be the main emphasis of assessment in the arts activities (O'Sullivan et al., 2023; Yağmur et al., 2024). Participants also mentioned that they label artistic products

made with children by asking them about the work, and they do not use a separate material for this purpose. They particularly emphasized that after five to six-year-old children learn to write their own names, they let the child label their own product. If a child does not want anything written on their artwork, they respect that wish and refrain from labelling. Throughout the entire implementation process, participants highlighted that they consult the opinions of children in this regard as well. Participants indicated that they document and display the products arising from children's art activities to track their development. One participant mentioned that they establish a selective committee for the exhibition, ensuring a balanced distribution by featuring different children's works in various exhibitions. At the end of the exhibition, all products are added to the children's individual portfolios. The participant even mentioned making plans for parents to virtually tour the exhibition prepared with the children, providing photographic evidence of the process and incorporating them into the documentation. Similarly, they make efforts to exhibit all children's products, displaying them on classroom and school walls, on classroom shelves, and even hanging three-dimensional products from the ceiling. This research underscores the essential role of child-centered, flexible, and exploratory approaches in early childhood art education. Results highlight that providing children with autonomy in artistic expression fosters creativity, self-discovery, and cognitive, social-emotional, and motor development. The research also emphasizes the significance of diverse materials, open-ended processes, and collaborative learning environments in enhancing children's engagement and intrinsic motivation. Moreover, the research recommends that educators should prioritize process over product, acting as facilitators rather than instructors, thereby allowing children to shape their artistic journeys. These insights contribute to the ongoing discourse on art education in early childhood, offering practical implications for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers in designing enriching and developmentally appropriate art experiences for young learners.

Implications

However, this research is limited by its small sample size, which may not fully capture the diverse experiences of educators working with young children in various educational settings. Future research could explore the perspectives of a broader range of educators, including those from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of early childhood art activities. Additionally, longitudinal researches could examine the long-term effects of child-centered art practices on children's creative and cognitive development, further informing educational policies and teacher training programs. Also, art activities in early childhood should be planned according to the interests, needs, and desires of children. For teacher candidates who will work with young children, it is recommended to review the content of the courses, have them delivered by a specialist in the field, and involve various visual art branches in the process. It is crucial for the entire process to be child-centred, ensuring that it is guided by children's interests and curiosities when planning, implementing, evaluating, and exhibiting. Improving art learning centers in classrooms, increasing material diversity, and, in parallel, creating art workshops in educational institutions, alongside art learning centers in classrooms, are suggested. Educators are recommended to utilize the immediate environmental conditions for art activities. They can integrate art activities in natural areas and combine them with out-

of-school learning environments. Collaborating between education and different art branches can provide children with richer experiences. Additionally, the results obtained indicate that art activities contribute significantly to children's development and learning. Research could be conducted on the impact of art activities on children's internal motivations and their ability to self-regulate.

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Statement of Responsibility

One author is responsible whole process of the research.

Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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