




Research Article

Evaluating the associate degree curriculum in child development

Fatih Demir

Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University, Erzincan, Türkiye

Correspondence should be addressed to Fatih Demir  fatihdemir1@gmail.com

Received 9 January 2024; Revised 1 March 2024; Accepted 13 March 2024

This case study aims to evaluate the associate degree curriculum in child development. In the curriculum evaluation process, Stufflebeam's CIPP curriculum evaluation model was chosen. In the process of collecting data, interviews were conducted with 64 associate degree students and six instructors working in this programme. The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed by content analysis method. The results suggest that the content of the most effective courses in the program includes important and new information for students' professional development, and includes the information needed in daily life. In addition, the students prefer to be taught practically and effectively with different methods/techniques in the teaching and learning processes. They also suggest that the program should include formative assessment and extracurricular activities such as visits to institutions, conferences/ seminars, and internships. On the other hand, the instructors stated that the problems arising from the students and the deficiencies related to the physical facilities (infrastructure), such as students' lack of interest/willingness to the course, reduce the effectiveness of the curriculum. Based on the results of the study, 21st-century skills should be included and students' professional, academic and social development should be supported in the program. Different methods/techniques, materials and extracurricular activities should be used to ensure that students engage in the course with interest and enthusiasm, and multiple assessment methods/tools should be used in the assessment and evaluation process.

Keywords: Curriculum evaluation, child development, associate degree

1. Introduction

Childhood lays the foundation for life in the future. During this period, it is essential to offer educational opportunities that support the development of children in all aspects and prepare them for their future lives; children should grow up to be physically, spiritually, and mentally healthy and equipped. It is crucial to train qualified humanpower in the field of child development in order to raise children who will influence society in the future. Many countries, including Türkiye, have opened child development programs to satisfy the need for qualified human resources.

In order to develop highly qualified and equipped child developers in order to care for children aged 0-18 who have special needs, are sick, require protection, or are at risk, child development programs are becoming widespread (Kızılırmak, 2019). As part of this program, a variety of assessment tools will be used to determine the development of children with normal or special needs, as well as to offer developmental counseling services to families and to conduct developmental identification studies as well as family counseling for children with special needs.

The Turkish higher education system today offers associate degree child development programs as well as undergraduate child development programs to prepare the workforce needed in child development. A majority of child development programs at the bachelor level are located within faculties of health sciences, schools of health or faculties of applied sciences; associate degree programs are located within vocational schools of health or university vocational schools. Additionally, some universities offer associate degree programs in child development through distance education (Council of Higher Education, 2023).

An associate degree program in child development has a curriculum covering four semesters. The basic courses in the curriculum, even though some electives vary, are generally designed to develop children with general and special development, child nutrition, child health and diseases, learning and teaching techniques, play, drama, behavior management, first aid, child psychology, mental health, child and communication, art and creativity, children's literature and media, family education, and communication skills. In addition, in the third and fourth semesters, students take professional practice courses at public and private institutions affiliated with the Ministry of National Education (Bayburt University, 2021; Uskudar University, 2021).

Within the scope of higher education institution preferences for 2023, a guide prepared by the Council of Higher Education indicates that a wide array of state and foundation universities offer child development programs on an associate or undergraduate basis. In light of these data, almost all universities in Türkiye offer education in child development at least in one vocational school. Additionally, it is worth noting that most state universities have more than one associate degree child development program, both within the city centers and within the districts, which illustrates the distribution of associate degree child development programs across Türkiye. A majority of their quotas were preferred by prospective students in previous years (Council of Higher Education, 2023). Based on all of this information, it can be concluded that child development associate degree programs have a significant number of students and almost all Turkish universities offer a child development associate degree program.

Turkish vocational colleges are responsible for training qualified intermediate staff for the field of child development via associate degree programs (Aksu et al., 2017). Graduating students from these programs have a broad range of duties and responsibilities, making it necessary to take measures to improve their education's quality. Developing curriculums according to the theories and principles of curriculum development is one way to improve quality of education at universities, and curricula should be evaluated periodically and systematically. This is the only way to develop curricula that are responsive to changing conditions, needs, and expectations.

The curriculum evaluation process uses some models as a basis. Context, Input, Process, Product (CIPP) is one of these curriculum evaluation models, developed by Daniel Stufflebeam (Yüksel & Sağlam, 2012). Based on this model, context evaluation describes the curriculum's environment, defines the desired and usual/actual situations related to that environment, focuses on missed opportunities and unmet needs, and investigates the causes of them (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004). At the micro level, input evaluation focuses on the curriculum and its elements (Uşun, 2012). Are the objectives set appropriately, for example? What are the educational institution's objectives in relation to the set objectives? Are the teaching strategies appropriate? (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004). Providing feedback on the curriculum implementation process is the main purpose of process evaluation. The aim of process evaluation is to determine whether the curriculum activities are being implemented according to plan, to identify problems that arise during the implementation of the initial plan, to take measures, and to periodically assess how well curriculum coordinators are performing. A product evaluation measures how well a curriculum meets the needs of the group it serves (Madaus et al., 1983). Product evaluation involves collecting data about a curriculum's product, comparing it with the expected product (Uşun, 2012).

It is essential to conduct regular and systematic curriculum evaluation studies to make curricula more effective. Curriculum evaluation is carried out to make judgments about the effectiveness of the curriculum implementation process (Erden, 1998), to reveal the value of the curriculum (Scriven, 1983), and to provide data for the curriculum development process (Demirel, 2010). Further, university curricula should be evaluated based on the principles and rules of curriculum evaluation in order to respond to changing needs and expectations (İlhan & Kalaycı, 2019).

The purpose of this study is to examine associate degree programs in child development. Based on the assumption that these programs are widespread in Türkiye today, their quotas are high and the number of potential graduates will be high in the future, it is thought that the evaluation of the curricula used in the child development associate degree curriculum providing education in the

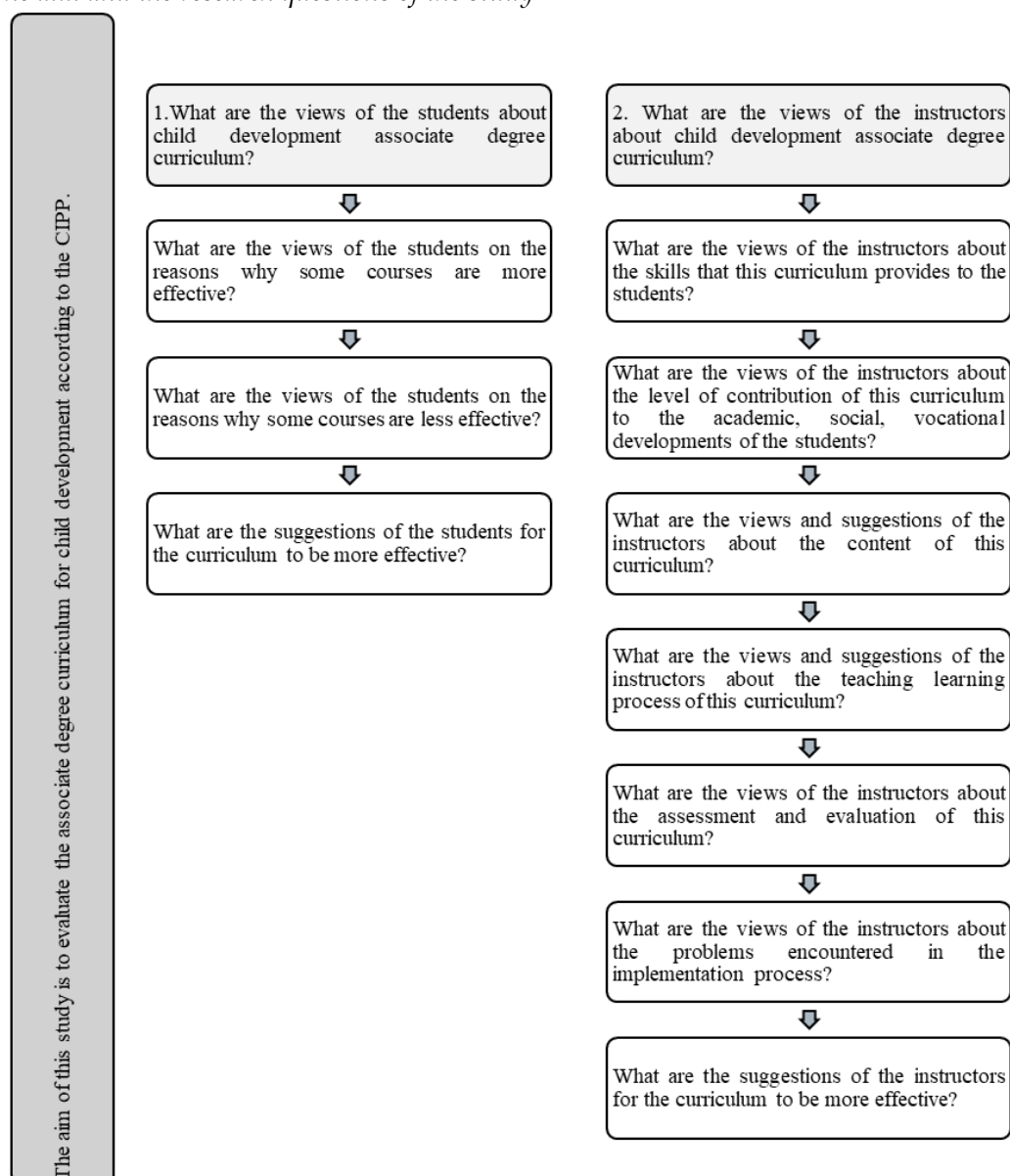
field of child development will make an important contribution to the academicians working in this field, the literature, new curricula that are likely to be developed in this field and thus to higher education. In particular, this study provides insights for academicians regarding content choice and course design.

Furthermore, when examining the literature on child development programs, it is evident that the majority of studies focus on the effects of various disciplines on child development, or on the relationship between these disciplines and child development, or on various factors that influence child development, or on the historical process of child development education. In contrast, few studies have been conducted on the evaluation of these curricula and no studies have been conducted on course level evaluation (Acar Çiftçi, 2020; Gülen & Dönmez, 2020; Tükel & Yıldız, 2018).

Students and instructors' views on the curriculum in child development, as well as their suggestions for more effective curriculum development and implementation, have been revealed in this study, which aims to evaluate the curriculum according to the CIPP model. This study aims to address the following research questions within its general objective shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The aim and the research questions of the study



2. Method

2.1. Study Design

The study adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative study is defined as research in which qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interview and document analysis are used and a qualitative process is followed in order to reveal perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic way as in the natural environment (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In this study, the current status quality of the child development associate degree curriculum was examined by making use of relevant documents and the experiences of internal stakeholders (instructors and students) (Fraenkel et al., 1993; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In this context, the study is designed as a case study because the child development associate degree curriculum is accepted as the complex phenomena (Yin, 2003) and it is examined according to the views of the instructors and students. In this curriculum evaluation study, the CIPP evaluation model was used. The most basic principle of curriculum evaluation emphasized by Stufflebeam is "to develop, not to prove" context, input, process, and product (Stufflebeam & Shinkfeld, 2007).

2.2. Study Group

The study group consisted of 64 students from the child development associate degree program of a university in Türkiye and six instructors working in this program. Convenience sampling method was used to select the participants. Of the students constituting the study group, 60 were female and four were male. Half of the students have an academic average between 2.51-3.00; about 30 per cent have an average between 3.01-3.50; about five per cent have an average between 3.51-4.00; about 12 per cent have an average between 2.01-2.50; and about 2 per cent have an average between 1.51-2.00. All of the six instructors working in the same program are female instructors. The age of the lecturers varies between 25 and 40, and the years of professional seniority varies between 2 and 12.

2.3. Data Collection

The interview method was utilized to collect the data in the study. The interview is a process involving mutual interaction based on asking and answering questions for a predetermined purpose (Stewart & Cash, 1985). Two different semi-structured interview forms developed by İlhan and Kalaycı (2018) were used to collect data from students and instructors by adapting them for this study by obtaining the necessary permissions from the researchers because the study group show some similarities and the curriculum evaluation model was used in these two studies. After the forms were adapted, the content and face validity were confirmed by taking the opinions of experts in the field of curriculum and instruction. The forms, developed based on the CIPP program evaluation model, consist of two parts. In the first part of both forms, there are questions about demographic information. There are nine questions in the second part of the form for students and 10 questions in the second part of the form for instructors. The questions asked to both the students and the instructors were determined in a way to enable them to evaluate all the courses they took according to the four dimensions of the program and to express their opinions.

The interviews were conducted with 64 students from a child development associate degree program of a vocational school of a state university at the end of the 2021-2022 academic year through WhatsApp, Zoom, and Skype applications. The interviews lasted between 15-20 minutes with each student and were completed in 32 days. Interviews with instructors were conducted face-to-face by the researcher at the end of the 2021-2022 academic year.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the interviews with students and instructors were analyzed by the content analysis method. Content analysis means analyzing the interviews or observation notes to identify the main themes that emerged as a result of the answers given by the participants or the observation notes kept by the researcher (Kumar, 2011). In this context, all answers obtained from

the interviews were transcribed by the researcher. The data obtained were coded and grouped into themes. Finally, the themes were discussed in light of the related research in the literature.

To ensure validity in qualitative research, the suggestion of peer confirmation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013), which is one of the additional methods that will help the researcher to confirm the data obtained and the results reached to create a holistic perspective on the phenomenon or event being researched, was used. In this context, two different experts, one from the field of educational sciences and the other from the field of child development were consulted for the validity of the semi-structured interview forms and the data analysis period. In the study, to increase the level of reliability, principles such as diversification of data sources and clearly stating all processes of the research were taken into consideration (Merriam, 2013). In this context, the diversity of data sources was enriched and the perspectives of both groups, namely students and instructors, were revealed. In the study, data collection and analysis processes were explained in detail and the statements of the participants were included in direct quotations.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

In this study, all the rules specified in the "Directive on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics of Higher Education Institutions" were followed. None of the actions specified under the second section of the Directive, "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics", have been carried out.

3. Findings

The findings obtained from students and instructors regarding the evaluation of the child development associate degree curriculum is presented below respectively.

3.1. The Students' Views regarding the Associate Degree Curriculum in Child Development

3.1.1. The reasons for some courses to be more effective according to students

According to the students, the findings related to the reasons why some courses in the Child Development associate degree curriculum are more effective compared to other courses are given in Table 1 under the themes of content, teaching-learning process, assessment, and evaluation.

Table 1

The reasons for some courses to be more effective according to students

Theme and Codes*	Student (S)
Content	
Providing important information for professional development	S4, S6, S8, S9, S10, S12, S13, S14, S16, S17, S18, S19, S20, S22, S25, S26, S29, S32, S33, S35, S37, S38, S39, S45, S47, S49, S54, S55, S57, S59
Providing new information	S2, S8, S9, S10, S12, S13, S14, S16, S19, S20, S21, S22, S26, S28, S29, S32, S35, S37, S38, S39, S41, S42, S44, S45, S46, S47, S48, S49, S52, S55
Providing information needed in daily life	S10, S12, S13, S15, S16, S18, S20, S28, S38, S40, S41, S48, S46, S49, S64
Being interesting	S3, S15, S26, S52
Providing a different perspective	S12, S46
Teaching and Learning Process	
Being practice-based	S2, S3, S4, S7, S8, S15, S21, S29, S31, S34, S44, S52, S54
Effective lecturing by the instructor	S6, S9, S15, S27, S29, S36, S38, S44, S48
Using different methods/techniques	S2, S3, S17, S19, S29, S34, S48
Being funny	S9, S13, S24, S36, S40, S42, S44, S52
Explaining with examples	S38, S48
Giving practical assignments	S9, S17
Having a small class size	S5, S7
Doing collaborative activities	S9
Assessment and Evaluation	
Challenging exams	S5

Note. The codes in each theme are listed from highest to lowest frequency value.

According to Table 1, students stated that they thought that some courses were more effective by focusing on the content, teaching-learning process, and assessment and evaluation features of the courses they took. According to the students, the courses whose content is especially important for their professional development, which contains new/updated information, and the information needed in daily life are the most effective in the program. Regarding the teaching-learning process of the course, the courses that are taught practically and explained effectively with different methods/techniques are the most effective courses. Students also stated that the courses with challenging exams were the most effective. Some student views on the reasons why some courses are more effective are as follows:

S6: The instructor both explained the subjects clearly and concisely and showed me how I should do my future profession.

S15: Thanks to the instructor, I realized how important the things that we constantly see in normal life but remain silent are.

S16: I think that three of the courses I have taken will give me the most knowledge and importance in my life and business life.

3.1.2. The reasons for some courses to be less effective according to students

According to the students, the findings related to the reasons why some courses in the associate degree program in child development are less effective compared to other courses are given in Table 2 under the themes of content, teaching-learning process, and general features. In addition, ten of the interviewed students emphasized that all of the courses in the program were effective and did not express an opinion on the reasons for not being effective.

Table 2

The reasons for some courses to be less effective according to students

<i>Themes and Codes*</i>	<i>Student (S)</i>
Content	
Not providing important information for professional development	S60, S55, S52, S50, S43, S27, S26, S25, S13
Not providing new information	S57, S29, S26, S19, S16
Not being difficult	S48, S43
Not taking interest	S43, S13
Teaching and Learning Process	
Not being hands-on	S45, S17
Not explaining effectively	S36, S42, S34
Not applying different methods/techniques	S59, S28, S34
Giving the course by distance education	S47, S40, S31, S24, S20, S14
General Features	
Inefficiency of the course	S42, S18

Note. The codes in each theme are listed from highest to lowest frequency value.

Table 2 suggests that students thought that some courses were less effective by focusing on the content, teaching-learning process, and general features of the courses. According to the students, the courses whose content is not particularly important for their professional development, which does not contain new/updated information, and includes difficult/uninteresting subjects are the least effective in the program. In addition, the courses that are not taught practically about the teaching and learning process of the course and could not be explained effectively with different methods/techniques are the least effective courses according to the students. In addition, students stated that some courses that are common to all programs, such as Foreign Language, Atatürk's Principles and History of Turkish Revolution, which are carried out through distance education throughout the university, should be taught face-to-face. Finally, some students emphasized that there were no ineffective courses among the courses they took. Some student views on the reasons why some courses are less effective are as follows:

S47: I think all courses are important, but most of the common courses such as Foreign Language that we learned through distance education were ineffective, I wish they were presented face-to-face.
 S29: This course could have been omitted, after all, it is the age of technology and everyone has dominant knowledge about the subjects of this course (information technologies).

3.1.3. Findings related to students' suggestions on making the curriculum more effective

The findings of the students' suggestions for the curriculum to be more effective are given in Table 3 under the themes of the teaching-learning process, content, assessment and evaluation, and extracurricular activities.

Table 3
 Students' suggestions to make the curriculum more effective

Themes and Codes*	Student (S)
Teaching and Learning Process	
Practice-based courses	S8, S9, S21, S26, S29, S30, S32, S33, S34, S37, S39, S40, S45, S47, S50, S51, S52, S60, S20, S7
Using different methods	S59, S53, S52, S44, S36, S28, S27, S18, S15, S57, S61
Use of various course materials	S60, S55, S42, S40, S36, S35, S30, S15, S4, S1, S50, S44, S4
Conducting face to face	S49, S46, S24, S13, S9
Teaching the lessons in labs	S60, S49
Shortening course durations	S31
Content	
Being clear/understandable	S54, S58
More interesting	S58
Assesment and Evaluation	
Evaluation of participation in the course	S58, S45, S47, S17, S14
Evaluation of assignments	S58
Including process evaluation	S48, S20
Extracurricular Activities	
Organising visits to institutions	S48, S45, S43, S38, S25, S24, S12, S6, S1
Organising conferences/seminars	S44, S13, S14, S36, S24, S18, S3, S1
Increasing the implementation of internship	S19, S2

Note. *The codes in each theme are listed from highest to lowest frequency value.

According to Table 3, the students made suggestions regarding the teaching and learning process, content, assessment-evaluation, and extracurricular activities to make the overall curriculum more effective. It is seen that the students' suggestions are mostly focused on the teaching-learning process. It is seen that according to the students, the lessons should be practice-based, different methods should be used, and materials should be used. Some of the student suggestions regarding the teaching-learning process are as follows:

S20: It is my recommendation and request that the course content should be reduced verbally and a concise expression should be provided and the remaining part should be spent practically.

S4: Instead of slides, I think that video pictures, etc. would attract more attention in terms of visual content.

S28: Different methods can be used in the lessons, that is, more examples can be used instead of reading and passing directly.

Another point that the students draw attention is related to the assessment and evaluation dimension of the curriculum. Students suggest that in-class activities, homework, and class participation should be included in the evaluation; in other words, they do not find it sufficient to

evaluate only the results and suggest that process evaluation should be made. Some student suggestions regarding assessment and evaluation are as follows:

S45: Theoretical knowledge is of course very important and it is possible to measure it with the exam system, but in this process, instead of constantly measuring my theoretical knowledge, it could have been observed how I could or could not apply this theoretical knowledge.

S20: I do not think that only the grades on the papers are enough to evaluate us. The real evaluation should also include the classroom and everyone can give systematic answers. Answers should be expressed freely. Examining memorised answers is not an evaluation.

In addition, students also made some suggestions regarding extracurricular activities. Students suggested that the courses they attend at universities should be enriched with field visits and activities such as conferences/seminars. Some students suggest that the internship program should be extended. Finally, students made suggestions regarding the content of the curriculum, albeit limited. According to them, the curriculum content should be clear/understandable and more interesting.

3.2. Instructors' Views regarding the Associate Degree Curriculum in Child Development

3.2.1. Findings regarding the skills that the child development associate degree curriculum provides to students according to the instructors

The instructors' views regarding the skills that the child development associate degree curriculum provides to the students are given in Table 4 below, in the context of 21st century skills.

Table 4

Instructors' views about 21st century skills that the associate degree curriculum in child development provides to students

<i>Theme and codes*</i>	<i>Instructor</i>
21st Century Skills	
Communication (written-verbal communication)	Ins.2, Ins.3, Ins.4, Ins.5, Ins.6
Critical thinking	Ins.2, Ins. 4, Ins.6
Creative thinking	Ins.1, Ins.2, Ins.3, Ins.6
Research	Ins.1, Ins.3, Ins.4, Ins.5, Ins.6
Transfer learning to life	Ins.2, Ins.3, Ins.4, Ins.5, Ins.6
Problem solving	Ins.1, Ins.2, Ins.3, Ins.5, Ins.6
Technology literacy	Ins.1- Ins.5
Working with a team	Ins.1, Ins.3, Ins.5, Ins.6

Note. *The codes in each theme are listed from highest to lowest frequency value.

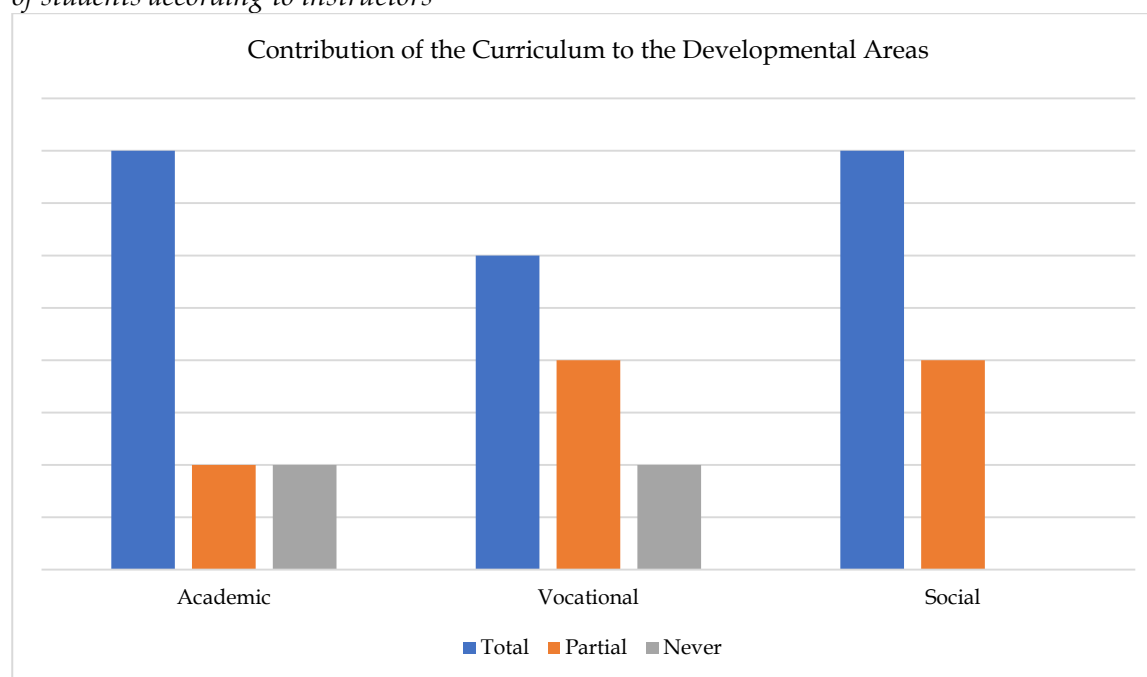
As seen in Table 4, the instructors stated that the students who graduated from the associate degree program in child development gained especially written-verbal communication, problem-solving, research and transferring learning to life. In addition, instructors stated that students gained creative thinking, teamwork, and critical thinking skills. Less frequently, instructors stated that students gained technology literacy skills.

3.2.2. Findings on the level of contribution of the associate degree curriculum in child development to the developmental areas of students according to instructors

The instructors' views regarding the level of contribution of the associate degree curriculum in child development to the developmental areas of the students were examined from academic, professional, and social perspectives, and Figure 2 below was created.

Figure 2

The level of contribution of the associate degree curriculum in child development to the developmental areas of students according to instructors



The instructors evaluated the contributions of the curriculum to the academic, professional, and social development of the students as completely, partially, and not at all. Accordingly, the instructors think that the curriculum they implemented contributed completely to the academic, professional, and social development of the students. The instructors' views on this subject are as follows:

Ins.3: The courses provide sufficient and necessary academic knowledge and skills.

Ins.2: The content is theoretically framed with situations that can be encountered in professional life.

Ins.3: While doing the assignments, sharing and communication skills are developed within the group. ... they develop the skills of focusing on the problem, solving the problem, using time efficiently, and managing the process. The course and the methods also contribute to meeting the social and personal needs of the students.

Some instructors think that the program they implement partially contributes to students' academic professional and social development. The opinions of the instructors on this subject are as follows:

Ins. 1: Partially to their academic development; because the number of students who are academically placed in undergraduate programs with the vertical transfer examination is not sufficient.

Ins. 4: I think that students lack communication with children and knowledge transfer due to the fact that practical courses cannot be carried out functionally in institutions. In this case, the program can partially contribute to their professional development.

Ins. 6: Partially; ... The fact that they live away from their families has caused our students to enter a new social environment. We direct students to work in groups with the courses. In this way, our students can be more socially active.

Very few instructors think that the curriculum they implement does not contribute at all to students' academic and professional development. The instructor' views on this issue are as follows:

Ins. 1: The professional development of students cannot be fully realized because I think that a student who does not receive pedagogical formation will not be professionally adequate.

3.2.3. Findings related to the instructors' views and suggestions regarding the content of the associate degree curriculum in child development

The findings regarding the instructors' views on the content of the associate degree curriculum in child development are presented in Table 5 under three themes: positive opinions, negative opinions, and suggestions.

Table 5

The instructors' views and suggestions regarding the content of the curriculum

<i>Themes and Codes*</i>	<i>Instructors</i>
Positive opinions	
Theoretically sufficient	Ins.1, Ins.-2, Ins.3, Ins.4, Ins.6
For professional needs	Ins.1, Ins.3, Ins.4, Ins.5
Consistent with the objectives of the program	Ins.3, Ins.5
Intriguing	Ins.5
Current	Ins.6
Negative opinions	
Inadequate support for students to acquire digital skills	Ins.1
Lack of practical knowledge	Ins.2
Suggestions	
Must be updated	Ins.1, Ins.3, Ins.5
Practices should be included	Ins.2, Ins.4, Ins.5
Must be flexible	Ins.5

Note. *The codes in each theme are listed from highest to lowest frequency value.

In Table 5, it is seen that the instructors expressed mostly positive opinions about the content. According to them, the content is relevant to the professional needs of the students, theoretically adequate, consistent with the objectives of the program, interesting and up-to-date. Almost all of the instructors stated that the program content is academically sufficient, in other words, the program content covers the theoretical knowledge that child development associate degree graduates should know. In addition, the instructors frequently stated that the program content is oriented towards professional needs. The instructors stated that the content of the program "can be used in professional life (Ins. 1)" and "it is useful and need-satisfying to provide students with up-to-date knowledge, skills and attitudes that they can easily use in their professional lives" (Ins. 5). The instructors expressed a negative opinion about the content that it did not include information about the application and the development of students' digital skills, albeit very little. The instructors also made some suggestions regarding the content of the curriculum. Among these suggestions, especially the suggestion to update the content was frequently expressed. In addition, the instructors also stated that the content should include practices and be flexible. Some of the statements of the instructors regarding these suggestions are given below.

Ins. 1: The natural and social conditions in which the student lives should be taken into consideration when determining the content and necessary arrangements should be made.

Ins. 5: It should be flexible enough for the individual to develop his/her own learning style by taking individual differences into consideration.

Ins. 4: ... I think that courses such as community service with projects should be added to the curriculum.

3.2.4. Findings of the instructors' views and suggestions of regarding the teaching-learning process of the child development associate degree curriculum

The findings of the instructors' views on the teaching-learning process of the child development associate degree curriculum are given in Table 6 in terms of the teaching strategies, methods/techniques they use in the learning-teaching process and how often they prefer them, and their suggestions on the teaching-learning process of the program are given in Table 7 below.

Table 6

The instructors' views on the teaching-learning process of the curriculum

<i>Strategy, Method, and Technique</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Frequently</i>	<i>Always</i>
Strategies					
Presentation (Lecturing)				5	1
Discovery		1	4		1
Research-Study			2	3	1
Methods and Techniques					
Narration				3	3
Discussion			3	2	1
Case study			1	4	1
Show-and-tell		1	2	1	2
Problem-solving		1	2	2	1
Individual work		2	3	1	
Brainstorming			2	1	2
Demonstration		1	3	1	
Question and answer			2	3	1
Drama		1	3	2	
Simulation		2	1	2	1
Computer assisted instruction			2	1	1
Travel	3	2	1		
Observation		2	3	1	
Exhibition	2	1	2	1	
Project	2		2	1	1
Interview	1	3	2		
Others					
The Game					1
Six Thinking Hats			1		

The instructors explained how often they applied the strategies and methods/techniques related to the teaching-learning process. When Table 6 is examined, it is seen that there is not much similarity among the instructors in terms of the strategies, methods/techniques and their frequency. It was determined that most of the instructors frequently used presentation, sometimes discovery and frequently inquiry strategies. In accordance with the presentation strategy, it was also seen that the lecture method was frequently used. It is also noteworthy that the case study method is frequently used by many instructors. On the other hand, it was determined that methods/techniques such as excursion, exhibition, project and interview were not applied at all.

Table 7

The instructors' suggestions on the teaching-learning process of the curriculum

<i>Theme and codes*</i>	<i>Instructors</i>
Suggestions	
Extracurricular activities should be increased	Ins.1-Ins.2
Field work should be increased	Ins.2
There should be practical training	Ins.4-Ins.2
The number of students should be reduced	Ins.3

Note. *The codes in each theme are listed from highest to lowest frequency value.

When Table 7 is examined, it is seen that the instructors made suggestions regarding the teaching-learning process of the curriculum in terms of increasing extracurricular activities, conducting field studies, and making the courses more practical. In addition, the instructors also made suggestions for reducing the class size. Some instructors explained their suggestions as follows:

Ins. 2: No child can be recognized and benefited without communicating with him/her, playing games, making observations, etc. So the flow of education should be provided with field studies in the field more frequently and with various institutions.

Ins. 4: I think that learning by doing and experiencing is always important. I think that application courses should be given more space.

3.2.5. Findings related to the instructors' views on the assessment and evaluation dimension of the associate degree curriculum in child development

The findings of the instructors' views on the assessment and evaluation dimension of the child development associate degree curriculum are given in Table 8 below.

Table 8

Instructors' views on the assessment-evaluation dimension of the curriculum

<i>Assessment-Evaluation Models and Methods</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Frequently</i>	<i>Always</i>
Product Evaluation			4	1	1
Process Evaluation			5		1
Written Exams				5	1
Rubric (Scoring guide)	2	2		2	
Checklist	1	2	2	1	1
Peer assessment	2	1	1		1
Self-assessment	1	3	1		1

The instructors stated that they made both product and process evaluations regarding the evaluation of the courses at child development associate degree program and that they especially used paper and pencil tests in this process. Most of the instructors stated that they never or rarely used alternative assessment methods such as rubrics, checklists, peer and self-assessments.

3.2.6. Findings related to the instructors' views on the problems encountered in the implementation process of the associate degree curriculum in child development

The instructors' views about the problems encountered in the implementation process are given in Table 9 below in the context of students and physical facilities.

Table 9

The instructors' views on the problems encountered in the implementation process of the curriculum

<i>Sources and Problems</i>	<i>Instructor</i>
Students	
Low participation rate	Ins.1
Disinterest - unwillingness	Ins.2, Ins.3, Ins.4, Ins.5
Readiness levels	Ins.3, Ins.6
Physical facilities	
Lack of workshops	Ins.1, Ins.3
Limited materials	Ins.2
Limited campus facilities	Ins.3

When Table 9 is analyzed, the instructors stated that there were problems arising from the students and physical facilities in the implementation process of the child development associate degree program. According to the instructors, there are problems arising from the students' low level of participation in the lesson, their lack of interest and reluctance in the lesson, and their lower-than-expected level of readiness. The opinions of some instructors regarding these problems are as follows:

Ins. 3: Students do not want to participate in project and assignment work during the lesson. Especially students who are not graduates of vocational high schools are even more reluctant because their readiness is insufficient.

Ins. 5: Students generally show low participation in the lessons; it has prepared the environment for communication and interaction to be one-sided and for students to disrupt their duties and responsibilities.

3.2.7. Suggestions of the instructors for the Child Development Associate degree curriculum to be more effective

The suggestions of the instructors on making the curriculum more effective are given below in Table 10 under the themes of extracurricular activities, teaching-learning process, and objectives.

Table 10

The Instructors' Suggestions for the Child Development Associate Degree curriculum to be more effective

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Suggestions</i>	<i>Instructor</i>
Extracurricular activities		
	Organizing informative meetings	Ins.2, Ins.4
	Organizing seminars related to the fields of study	Ins.2
	Being an application class/school	Ins.3
Teaching and learning process		
	Using different methods and techniques in lessons	Ins.4, Ins.5
	Reducing the number of students	Ins.3
Objectives		
	Being accessible	Ins.5
	To increase their digital skills	Ins.6

In Table 10, the instructors made suggestions regarding extracurricular activities, the teaching-learning process, and objectives to eliminate the problems encountered in the implementation process of the curriculum and to make it more effective.

Ins. 3: The curriculum should be close to the application areas to carry out the necessary theoretical courses as well as the application courses. Students and course instructors should be able to access this opportunity easily and whenever they want. The application class/school can be put into operation in an area close to the region where the school is located. The number of students per classroom should not be too high for the courses to be more qualified and useful.

Ins. 2: Students may not show the necessary sensitivity about the program. Seminars can be organized and information can be given in cases such as the importance of the department and working areas.

4. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, in which the associate degree curriculum in child development was evaluated based on the views of students and instructors, findings related to the purpose, content, teaching-learning process, and evaluation dimensions of the program were obtained. In line with these findings, firstly the views of the students and then the instructors' views are discussed below with comparative analyses where appropriate.

Students focused on the content of the courses in the curriculum and stated that some courses were more effective. According to them, the courses whose content is important for their professional development, that contains more new/updated information, and includes the information needed in daily life are the most effective in the program. In addition, the courses that are taught practically and effectively with the use of different methods/techniques are the most effective courses according to the students. According to the students, the courses that do not have these qualities are the least effective ones. In another study in which a curriculum applied in higher education was evaluated, similar findings were found with the current study regarding the content of the curriculum. For example, in Demir's (2012) study evaluating the vocational knowledge courses in faculties of education, students suggested that the subjects in the content of the program should be reduced and subjects that would be more useful for their professional life should be included in the content. In Demir's study, similar to the current study, students

expressed positive opinions about the use of different methods and techniques in the courses. In addition, Eroğlu and Kalaycı (2020), in their comparative study of face-to-face and distance education courses in higher education, concluded that students' views that instructors do not use effective teaching methods and techniques are frequently expressed. Instead of the usual teacher-centered approach at the university level, it is an important necessity required by today's educational understanding to prefer teaching methods that are interesting and make students active by putting them at the center (Memduhoğlu & Tanhan, 2013). On the other hand, Günay and Özer (2016) emphasized that there is a problem of lack of training with practice in child development associate degree programs. As the current and related studies conclude the content should include important and practical information for their professional development.

Another important finding of the study is the students' suggestions on assessment and evaluation to make the curriculum more effective. The students criticize the current curriculum and suggest that their participation in the course and the homework they do should be included in the evaluation, in other words, process evaluation should be made. A large majority of instructors within the scope of the research stated that they occasionally conduct process evaluations. Combining these two findings, it can be concluded that students expect the program to include more process evaluation. Students' expectations are consistent with the findings of other studies conducted at higher education levels, as well as suggestions to improve learning-teaching activities. In Demir's (2012) study, students suggested the use of alternative evaluation methods and techniques, in other words, process evaluation (Demir, 2012). The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2009) also emphasizes that it is important to conduct multiple evaluations to make education and training activities more effective in higher education.

This multiple assessment can be achieved by including the course participation and assignments, which were also mentioned by the students in the current study, in the assessment process. In today's higher education programs, rather than determining the current status of a student and being only result-oriented; assessment and evaluation is expected to help the student to shape learning and to help achieve the desired goal (Bozkurt, 2017). The realization of these expectations is possible through process evaluation of the expectations of the students in the current research.

Another important finding of the study is the emphasis students place on extracurricular activities when evaluating the effectiveness of the programs. Students suggest that extracurricular activities such as organizing visits to institutions, organizing conferences/seminars, and internships should be included in the program. In-class activities are not sufficient to provide a learning-teaching process. Integrated classroom and extracurricular activities can enhance learning-teaching activities. Facilities are expected to be provided by institutions for this integration requirement. Additionally, instructors whose opinions were included in the study suggested that extracurricular activities should be increased to improve the effectiveness of the evaluated program. It is possible to provide informal learning both inside and outside of the school setting by incorporating these extracurricular activities into the educational process (Brooks, 2007 as cited in Keser et al., 2011).

In addition, to the expectations of the students, the internships offered/expected to be offered within the scope of the program are very important for students to reach the expected competencies in associate degree programs. Internships enable students to reinforce their theoretical knowledge and skills acquired in other courses with practice and to understand their responsibilities, organization, relationships, and processes in the workplace where they will work after graduation (Acar-Çiftçi, 2020). As a result, it is very effective in helping students who graduate from associate degree programs, designed to train intermediate staff, achieve the desired results in vocational education, and they can then transition into a profession very quickly. As a result of examining these opinions, it was determined that the instructors considered the program they implemented to have contributed to the academic, professional, and social development of the students. Further, according to them, this program enables students to develop 21st-century skills including communication (written-verbal communication), research, application, and

problem-solving. As a result of an analysis of the instructors' opinions about the problems encountered during the implementation process, it was determined that two themes emerged. In light of this, it is noteworthy that instructors consider students to be the cause of problems. Lack of interest/willingness on the part of the students reduces the effectiveness of the program, according to the instructors. The students can suggest a solution to this situation, which will reduce the level of participation in the course and negatively affect students' learning. According to the research, students expect the courses to be taught practically, to use a variety of methods, and to use a variety of course materials. It is effective to increase the students' enthusiasm and interest in the course by setting these expectations.

Instructors also attribute the problem to deficiencies in physical facilities (infrastructure). Among the reasons the programs examined failed to reach the expected level are the absence of workshops, the lack of materials, and the lack of campus facilities. According to the present study, students also agree with the views of their instructors. Students suggested that the courses should be taught practically and in workshops, and that a variety of course materials should be provided. It is possible that the suggestions of the students stem from the fact that the current program does not adequately meet their expectations. Similarly, in the studies conducted by Binici and Arı (2004) and Ergin and Yağcı (2003), it was concluded that there were similar problems with the expressions of "lack of physical equipment" and "physical inadequacies" respectively among the problems of the students studying in the associate degree curriculum of child development. When the dates of these studies and the year in which the current study was conducted are taken into consideration, the fact that the problem of lack of similar equipment continues for almost twenty years in different vocational schools may indicate that there are still many steps to be taken regarding the solution of infrastructure problems in higher education.

All in all, this study evaluating the associate degree curriculum in child development provide important insights, especially for selection of content, design of the courses, and the assessment and evaluation. Furthermore, it is important that the students underlined the importance of extracurricular activities. The academicians and decisionmakers in higher education should take these insights into consideration.

As a result, associate degree programs in child development reach almost full occupancy rates every year and new ones are added to existing programs every day (Council of Higher Education, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). These programs, which provide students with the opportunity to work as intermediate staff in places related to their fields or help them gain the right to continue their undergraduate programs, increase the importance of their continuous evaluation and re-development both in terms of their high prevalence and the importance and size of the audience they affect. In the current study, this evaluation was carried out and the following suggestions were made for the subsequent redevelopment process: 21st-century skills should be included in the objective dimension of the programs, and students' professional, academic, and social development should be supported. In the educational situation dimension, different techniques and materials should be used to ensure that students participate in the lesson with interest and enthusiasm, and multiple assessment methods/tools should be used in the assessment and evaluation process. In addition, for the curricula to be more effective, it can be suggested that extracurricular activities should be arranged to be more numerous and diverse. Based on the scientific research process carried out in the current study, it may be recommended to conduct curriculum evaluation studies by including different evaluation models and different stakeholders. In addition, the curriculum in one university was evaluated in this study. In this context, comparative studies can be conducted to evaluate curricula in different universities. Finally, different curriculum evaluation studies based on the views of graduates can also be conducted.

Declaration of interest: No conflict of interest is declared by the author.

Ethics declaration: Author declared that the study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Bayburt University on 11.02.2021 with approval number: E-51694156-050.99-44149.

Funding: No funding was received for undertaking this study.

References

- Acar-Çiftçi, Y. (2020). Bridging knowledge and action in the workplace: an evaluation on internship learning outcomes of child development associate degree program students. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 9(3), 174-186. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v9n3p174>
- Aksu, B., Akandere, G., Çetin, C., & Demiralay, T. (2017). The importance of vocational schools in Turkey and evaluation of students' attitudes. *Journal of Current Researches on Social Sciences*, 7(2), 287-306.
- Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2009). *Trends and emerging practices in general education*. AACU. http://www.aacu.org/membership/documents/2009MemberSurvey_Part2.pdf
- Bayburt University. (2021). *Information package of associates' degree course catalogue: Aydıntepe vocational high school child care and youth services child development courses*. Author.
- Binici, H., & Arı, N. (2004). Seeking new perspectives in technical and vocational education. *Gazi University Journal of Gazi Education Faculty*, 24(3), 383-396.
- Bozkurt, B.Ü. (2017). An assessment framework on speaking skills of Turkish native speakers. *Journal of Mother Tongue Education*, 5(4), 924-947.
- Council of Higher Education. (2020). *Yükseköğretim programları atlası 2020*. [Atlas of higher education programs 2020]. Author. <https://yokatlas.yok.gov.tr/onlisans-program.php?b=30146>
- Council of Higher Education. (2021). *Yükseköğretim programları atlası 2021*. [Atlas of higher education programs 2021]. Author. <https://yokatlas.yok.gov.tr/onlisans-program.php?b=30146>
- Council of Higher Education. (2022). *Yükseköğretim programları atlası 2022*. [Atlas of higher education programs 2022]. Author. <https://yokatlas.yok.gov.tr/onlisans-program.php?b=30146>
- Council of Higher Education. (2023). *Yükseköğretim programları atlası 2023*. [Atlas of higher education programs 2023]. Author. <https://yokatlas.yok.gov.tr/onlisans-program.php?b=30146>
- Demir, S. (2012). *Among the courses related to knowledge of teaching profession which are in the curriculum of the faculties of education evaluation of the instructional principles and methods course* (Publication No: 317087) [Master's dissertation, Gazi University]. Council of Higher Education Thesis Center.
- Eroğlu, F., & Kalaycı, N. (2020). Comparative evaluation of the distance and face-to-face education practices in the required Turkish language course at universities. *Journal of MotherTongue Education*, 8(3), 1001-1027.
- Demirel, Ö. (2010). *Kuramdan uygulamaya: Eğitimde program geliştirme* [Theory to practice: Curriculum development in education]. Pegem.
- Erden, M. (1998). *Eğitimde program değerlendirme* [Curriculum evaluation in education]. Anı.
- Ergin, A., & Yağcı, Ö. (2003). An evaluation of the vocational school and short term higher education project of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education Council. *Hacettepe University Journal of Education Faculty*, 25(25), 256-264.
- Fraenkel, R. J., & Wallen, E. N. (2000). *How to design and evaluate research in education*. McGraw-Hill.
- Gülen, S., & Dönmez, İ. (2020). Determining the metaphors of the students in the child development program for the concepts of "child" and "child development. *OPUS International Journal of Society Researches*, 15(25), 3654-3683. <https://doi.org/10.26466/opus.654029>
- Günay, D., & Özer, M. (2016). The development of Turkish post-secondary vocational colleges in the 2000's and the current challenges. *Journal of Higher Education and Science*, 6(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.5961/jhes.2016.138>
- İlhan, E., & Kalaycı, N. (2018). Evaluating core curricula implemented at undergraduate programs of universities. *Journal of Higher Education*, 8(3), 264-281. <https://doi.org/10.2399/yod.18.014>
- İlhan, E., & Kalaycı, N. (2019). How to evaluate curricula in higher education? Designs based on four-stage evaluation and discrepancy models. *Journal of Higher Education and Science*, 9(3), 349-362. <https://doi.org/10.5961/jhes.2019.337>
- Keser, F., Akar, H. & Yıldırım, A. (2011). The role of extracurricular activities in active citizenship education. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 43(6), 809-837. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2011.591433>
- Kızılırmak, E. (2019). *Investigation of academian opinions on Bologna proces in associate degree child development programs* (Publication No: 606560) [Master's dissertation, Atatürk University]. Council of Higher Education Thesis Center.
- Kumar, R. (2011). *Araştırma yöntemleri* [Research methods]. In Çokluk Ö., Şekercioğlu G. & Atak. H. (Eds.). *Araştırma yöntemleri: Yeni başlayanlar için adım adım araştırma rehberi*. [Research methods: A step by step research guide for beginners]. Edge.

- Madaus, G.F, Scriven, M., & Stufflebam, D. L. (1983). Viewpoints on *educational and human services evaluation*. D.L Kluwer-Nijhoff.
- Memduhođlu, H. B., & Tanhan, F. (2013). Study of organisational factors scale's validity and reliability affecting university students' academic achievements. *YYU Journal of Education Faculty*, 10(1), 106-124.
- Merriam, S. B. (2013). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Ornstein, A. C. & Hunkins, F.P. (2004) *Curriculum foundations: principles and theory*. Allyn and Bacon.
- Scriven, M. (1983). The methodology of evaluation. In B. Worthen & J. Sanders (Eds.) *Educational evaluation: theory and practice* (pp.39-83). Wadsworth.
- Stewart, J., Charles-Casch, B., & William, I. (1985). *Principles and Practices*. WC Brown.
- Stufflebeam, D. L., & Shinkfield, A. J. (2007). The nature of program evaluation theory. In D. L. Stufflebeam & A. J. Shinkfield (Eds.), *Evaluation: theory, models and applications* (pp. 685-686). Jossey-Bass.
- Tükel, A., & Yıldız, S. (2018). Examining attitudes of child development program students towards scientific activities. *Journal of International Social Science Education*, 4(2), 128-143.
- Uskudar University. (2021). *Vocational school of health services child development program content*. Author. <https://uskudar.edu.tr/sbf/assets/uploads/sbf/wp-content/uploads/cocuk-gelisimi-ders-icerikleri.pdf>
- Uşun, S. (2012). *Eđitimde program deđerlendirme: Süreçler yaklaşımlar ve modeller* [Curriculum evaluation on education: Processes approaches and models] Anı.
- Yıldırım, A., & Şimşek, H. (2013). *Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri*. [Qualitative research methods in social sciences]. Seçkin.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. The Guilford.
- Yüksel, İ., & Sağlam, M. (2012). *Eđitimde program deđerlendirme*. [Curriculum evaluation in education]. Pegem.