# Examination of Abstracts Presented at the 6th International Preschool Education Congress

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the abstracts in 6th International Preschool Education Congress abstract book in terms of research subject, method, model, sample type, data collection tools, data analysis techniques, validity and reliability. This study is a qualitative study and was conducted using document analysis, which is one of the qualitative research methods. 295 papers in the abstract book of the 6th International Preschool Education Congress held in Kars, Turkey were included in this study. Each abstract consists of at least 500 words in the 1206 pages abstract book. Descriptive analysis, one of the qualitative data analysis techniques, was used in data analysis. The data obtained in the study were visualized through graphics. As a result of the study, it was determined that child development, teacher training, educational environments, education programs and family participation were most studied in the abstract of the papers. It was concluded that quantitative and qualitative methods were preferred in the studies, but the mixed method was not preferred by the researchers. Preschool children, teachers, parents and prospective teachers were most studied as sample groups. It was observed that there are a few studies conducted with faculty members and administrators. The quantitative research mostly used the screening/descriptive design; the experimental designs were very low and longitudinal studies are not preferred. In qualitative research, case study design is generally preferred. Scale and interview forms were the most used data collection tools. It was concluded that correlational analysis and content analysis are the most used data analysis techniques. It was determined that the use of advanced statistical techniques is very low. Also the validity and reliability information is generally not available in the abstracts. It was concluded that ¼ of the abstracts in the congress abstract book do not include any results and conclusion.

**Key words :** Preschool Education, Congress Abstract, Paper Analysis

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of preschool education is to provide all children with access to quality and developmentally appropriate programs to prepare them for the school (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007; Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm & Waldfogel, 2004). Many preschool education programs have had positive impacts on the learning and development of children. Preschool education contribute to supporting children's developmental zones, social adaptation and preparation for primary school (Barnett, 1992). A well-organized preschool education program increases the academic success of children and the rate for attendance in higher education, reduces the crime rates and the need for private education. An investment in preschool education programs provides significant gains in the educational, social and economic areas (Barnett, 2008; Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm & Waldfogel, 2004; Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield & Nores, 2005; Reynolds & Temple, 2006; Temple & Reynolds, 2007).

A survey conducted by the Education Reform Initiative show that public institutions has given more importance to preschool education in Turkey, therefore it is observed that participation in preschool education has increased. However, it has emerged that the enrollment rates in preschool education are below the average of OECD countries (Aktan & Akkutay, 2014; Atli, 2013; Education Reform Initiative, 2017). According to 2019 statistics from the Ministry of Education in Turkey, although 93 302 preschool teachers work, the number of students in preschool education is 1.564.813. The number of classrooms reserved for preschool education is expressed as 81,297. Schooling rates are shared as 44.05 percent in 3-5 years of age, 56.24 percent in 4-5 years of age, and 75.17 percent in 5 years of age (MoNE, 2019). In OECD countries school enrollment rates of the 3-5 years of age are over 90 percent, this rate is 44,05 percent in Turkey. In Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom, it exceeds 95 percent. A few countries have experienced spectacular increases in ECEC within this period such as Lithuania, Poland, the Russian Federation and Turkey (OECD, 2020). Turkey is not at the expected level of participation and equal distribution in early childhood education across the country (World Bank, 2011).

Concerning the scientific congress in Turkey in the field of preschool education, the 1st international congress was held in 2004 at Marmara University, Istanbul. The 2nd international preschool education congress was also held by Marmara University in 2007. After these congresses, Marmara University organized the 1st National Preschool Education Congress in 2011, but this was the first and also the last national congress. The 3rd international preschool education congress was held at Çukurova University, Adana in 2012, the 4th international preschool education congress was held at Hacettepe University, Ankara in 2015, the 5th international preschool education congress was held at Gazi University, Ankara in 2017 and finally the 6th international preschool education congress was held in Kars in 2019. It has been decided to organize the 7th international preschool education congress at Ege University, Izmir in 2021. In addition, 14 national preschool student congresses have been held so far.

The scientists spend a major part of their time on researching and publishing the results from their research (Liberman & Wolf, 1997). One of the final objectives of the researchers is to share their research with their colleagues and society. There are two ways to do that. One is to present their research as a scientific article, and the other is to present it as an oral presentation or as a poster presentation in a congress. The research findings presented at a scientific congress are brief, therefore they only contain the basic data (Bhandari, Devereaux, Guyatt, Cook, Swiontkowski, Sprague & Schemitsch, 2002). The abstracts presented at a congress are peer reviewed to accept. Presentation of a study as an abstract at the congress may have an effect on the publication of that study on a journal. Furthermore, originality and reliability of research, size of the sample studied, and obtaining significant results from the study may affect publication of presented abstracts as an article on the scientific journals (Callaham, Wears, Weber, Barton & Young, 1998; Scherer, Meerpohl, Pfeifer, Schmucker, Schwarzer & von Elm, 2018). A poster presentation presented at a congress is not less significant than an oral presentation. On the contrary, displaying a poster presentation for several days or during the congress provides advantage to share the scientific information. A poster presentation also has more dialogs and interactions. Most of the quality scientific information has been presented as

a poster presentation (Stewart, Chandra, Chiu, Hanna, Kennedy, Kraus, ... & Rosenfeld, 2013). Higher quality of poster presentations presented at a congress is important to provide higher quality of scientific information. The rate for publication of studies presented in the congress abstracts is one of the widely accepted quality features of the congress and indicates the scientific value of studies presented (Schulte, Huck, Osada, Trost, Lange, Schmidt, ... & Bullmann, 2012).

The congress are not only important for the scientists to share their scientific findings but also useful for establishing a communication network across the scientists, creating a relationship of trust, setting common goals, exchanging information, cooperating through a variety of projects, and sharing opinion of scientists on their own expertise (Evered, Porter & Nugent, 1985). Individually, we attend a congress to gain more information on our own study areas, get together with our co-workers, and move away from daily routines (Rowe & Ilic, 2015). A scientific congress is important for the young scientists to develop their career and have an opportunity to get together with scientists experienced in the area (Urban & Boscolo, 2013). The congresses are also important to establish a mutual trust and understanding among the scientists (Alberts, 2013). However, some congresses are criticized as they are expensive, have a poor quality, and are not sufficient to meet the needs of young scientists (Evered, Porter & Nugent, 1985).

The studies in the field of preschool education varies in Turkey. Considering the thesis studies in the field of preschool education, it is seen that a total of 527 theses including 483 master's theses, 40 doctoral dissertations and 4 expertise thesis in medicine were uploaded to the YÖK national thesis center in the last two years. Concerning the subject distribution of these theses, it is seen that most of the thesis studies are about social skills, especially emotion regulation skills, preschool special education, communication technologies and computer-aided education, values education, creativity and art, games, children's literature, gender studies, environment and STEM education, respectively. Demirtaş İlhan & Tantekin Erden (2019) in their study found that students were the most frequently used study groups in early childhood education master theses and dissertations. Güvelioğlu (2019) in her study showed that almost half of the articles in early childhood education context were designed as quantitative studies. In complement with that, three most prevalent research methods were identified to be survey, experimental, and correlational. The widespread choice of sample group in the articles was children. Abalı Öztürk & Demir (2018) analysed of graduate theses on early childhood education, they figured out in their study that the focal point of the theses is majorly qualifications of preschool teachers, characteristics and tendencies of parents, effects of different approaches/methods on early childhood education, characteristics of children in early childhood education. Cook, Beckman & Bordage (2007) reviewed in the article abstracts in their research and concluded that 48% of abstracts contained findings whereas 61% of abstracts had research results. In their research, Callaham, Wears, Weber, Barton & Young (1998) concluded that 43% of research presented as abstract at the congress were later published as an article. The rate for publication of abstracts presented at the congress as an article ranges between 8% and 81% (Scherer, Meerpohl, Pfeifer, Schmucker, Schwarzer & von Elm, 2018). Schulte, Huck, Osada, Trost, Lange, Schmidt,... & Bullmann (2012) reported that it was approximately take 18 months to publish an abstract presented at the congress as a scientific article. Çifçi & Ersoy (2019) investigated the orientation of research on preschool education through a content analysis and concluded that topics discussed in the relevant research included zones of development, educational materials, method-technique, program studies, and involvement of parents. Most of the studies used the screening method, one of the quantitative research methods, and the most studied sample was the preschool students. It is concluded that the most used data collection tool in the studies is the interview form.

The purpose of this research is to examine the abstracts contained in the book of abstracts presented at the 6$^{th}$ International Preschool Education Congress in terms of research subject, methods, design, sample type, data collection tools, data analysis techniques, validity and reliability. This research is important to indicate the studies performed by the specialists in the preschool education, the methods and techniques used by them, and originality and quality of studies, and to develop a holistic perspective. This research is useful for the specialists to obtain general information on the studies performed by their colleagues. This research is also considered significant for the researchers to view the most studied or the least studied subjects in the relevant area and closely observe the

alternative models, new approaches, and groups, conditions or studies that need to be supported. This study presents the current tendencies in the preschool education, studied subjects and methods used in order to provide guidance to the respective researchers, allow them to evaluate the studies performed and criticize themselves, and recognize the deficiencies and requirements to provide insight on what to do in further studies. This research is original because despite a detailed search, rarely similar study was found that have analyzed the content of oral presentations at a preschool scientific congress.

### Purpose of the research

This study aims to examine of abstracts presented at the 6th International Preschool Education Congress held in Kars, Turkey. As part of this general objective, answers to the following research questions were sought:

1. How is the subject distribution of the papers presented from the 3rd IPEC?
2. How are the methods, research designs and working groups of the papers presented from the 3rd IPEC?
3. What are the data collection tools, data analysis techniques and validity and reliability studies of the papers presented from the 3rd IPEC?

## METHOD

This is a qualitative research and was performed by reviewing documents, one of the qualitative research methods. The documents constitute an important source of data for the qualitative research and include both private and official documents (Creswell, 2009). The document analyzed for this research is the book of abstracts presented at the 6th International Preschool Education Congress held in Kars, Turkey in 2019. As the congress organization board required that an abstract must contain minimum 500 words, the congress' book of abstracts was considered to contain sufficient data.

### Study Material

This research included 295 abstracts contained in the book of abstracts for the 6th International Preschool Education Congress held in Kars, Turkey between 2 and 5 October, 2019. All abstracts presented at the congress were examined. 12 of the abstracts shared the results of different projects. 4 abstracts presented were a compilation. Each of the abstracts contained in the book of abstracts of 1206 pages comprised of minimum 500 words. There were no poster presentations at the congress. There were 5 panels that included speakers from 5 different countries: the USA, New Zealand, Egypt, the United Kingdom and TRNC (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus). At the congress, there were also 9 workshops and one charrette conducted on different matters. In addition, there were no abstracts sent from foreign countries to the congress.

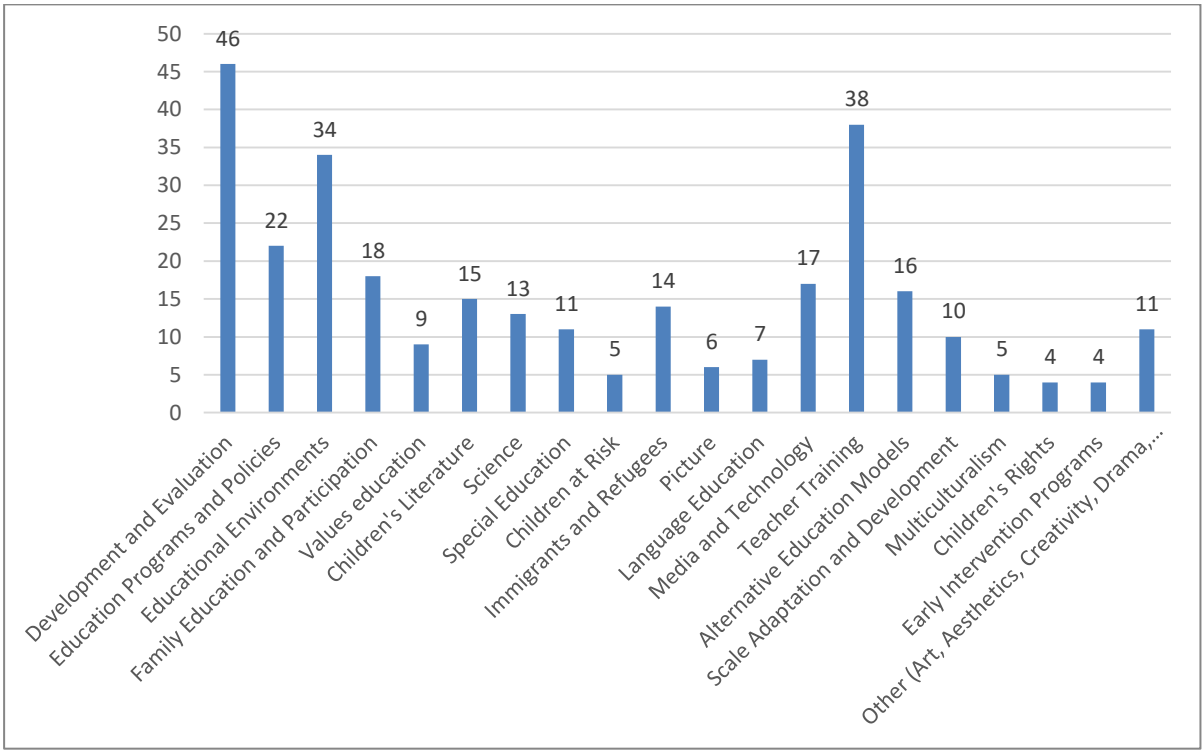
### Data Analysis

The descriptive analysis, one of the data analysis techniques, was used to analyze data. The descriptive analysis is a data analysis technique that analyzes the samples of written communications of researchers in order to allow them indirectly study the human behaviors. The descriptive analysis is an analysis method based on summarizing and interpreting data collected with various data collection techniques within the framework of predetermined themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The descriptive analysis is often used for the analysis of written materials such as newspapers, journals, articles, books and documents, therefore, it was considered to suit the purpose of this research (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2011). In the qualitative research, the researcher collects the data, divides the data into codes, and counts the divided codes to create certain categories. The researcher then creates themes from the categories of grouped codes (Patton, 2002). A content analysis form was developed by the researcher to analyze the abstracts included in this research. In development of the content form for the findings

obtained from this study, the themes were determined based on whether the research was completed, the subject of research, methods, design, sample type, data collection tools, data analysis techniques, and validity and reliability study. The abstracts included in the research were coded under the themes contained in the content analysis form developed by the researcher and the findings were listed accordingly. Reliability is not provided in the qualitative research as used in the quantitative research. Instead, consistency (one of the areas focused by the reliability) is considered (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Therefore, the abstracts were individually coded by two different encoders based on the content analysis form for the validity and reliability study of the research. To ensure internal consistency in the study, the formula suggested by Miles & Huberman (1994) (reliability= agreement /agreement + disagreement) was used to calculate the harmony between the encoders. The harmony calculated was 93% between the encoders and this shows that harmony was very high because harmony between the encoders is expected to be 90% depending on the size and range of the coding form (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data obtained from the research was represented as graphics because the representation of data in graphics would allow making data visible and conceptualization (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

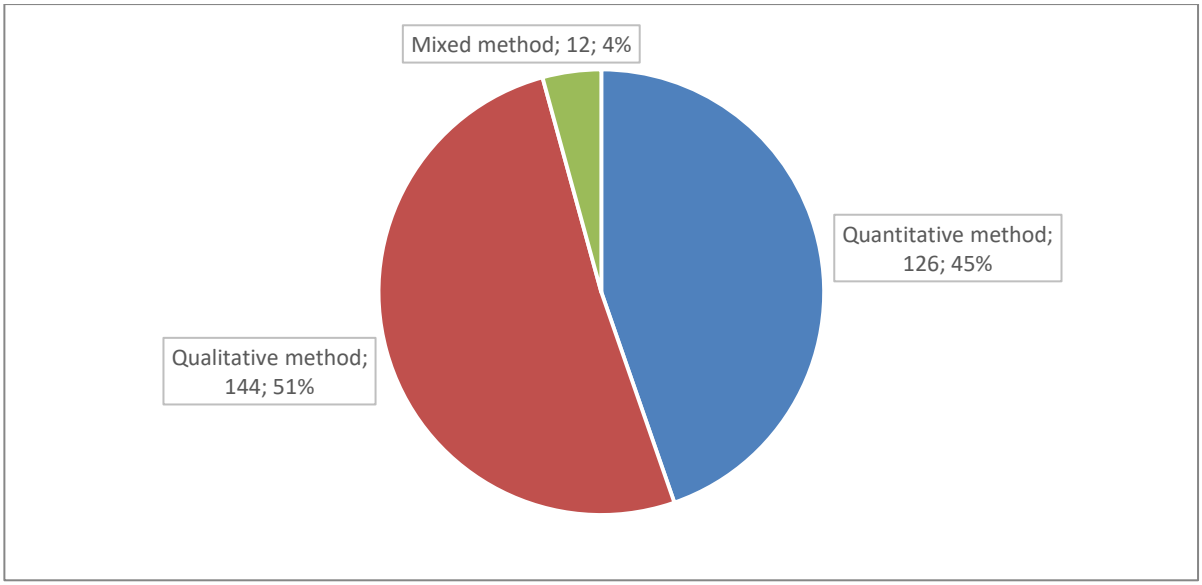
## FINDINGS

The following graphic shows the findings from the review of book of abstracts presented at the 6th International Preschool Education Congress.



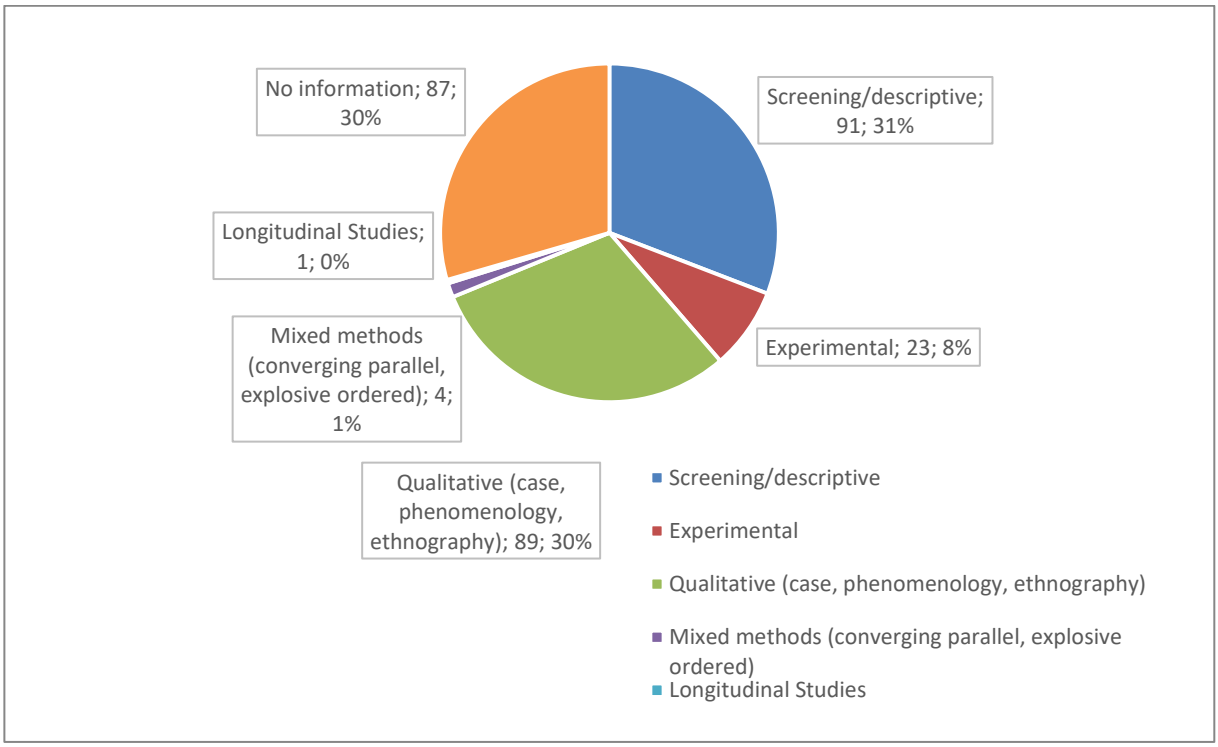

**Graphic 1. Distribution of subjects studied in the abstracts**

Graphic 1 above shows that scientists studying the preschool education mostly chose the development and evaluation (46), teacher training (38), educational environments (34), education programs and policies (22), family education and participation (18), media and technology (17), alternative education models (16), children's literature (15) and immigrants and refugees (14). The scientists performed less studies on the children at risk (5), multiculturalism (5), children's rights (4) and early intervention programs (4), and they were not really interested in aesthetics, arts, creativity, and drama.



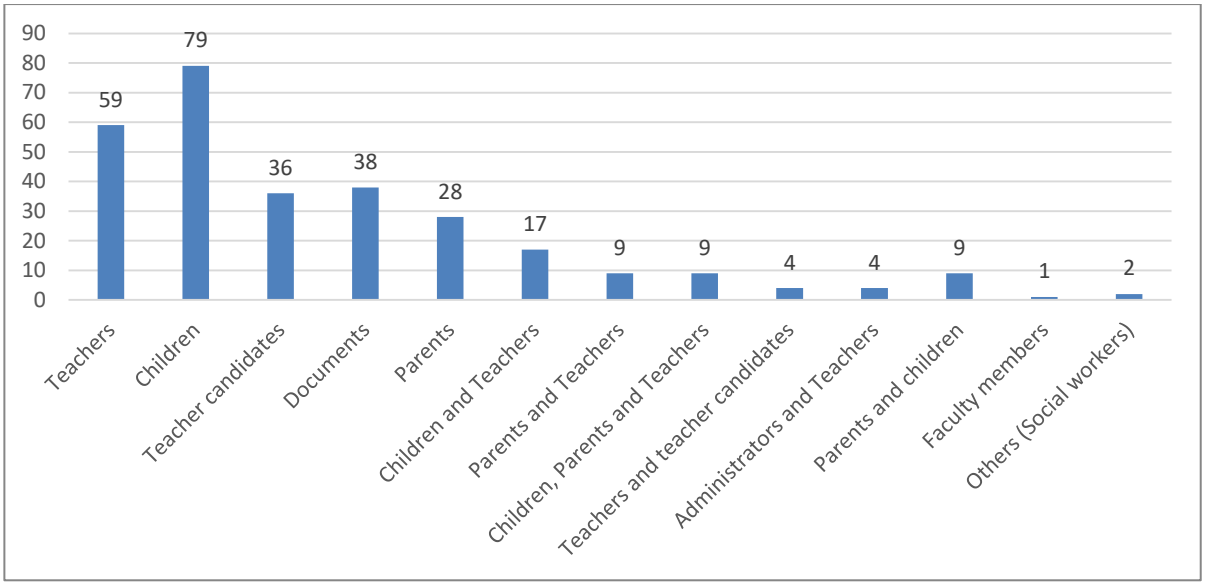

**Graphic 2. Research methods used in the abstracts**

As presented in Graphic 2, there was an even distribution across the studies: Quantitative Method (45%) and Qualitative Method (51%), however, the scientists studying the preschool education were not interested in mixed method (4%).



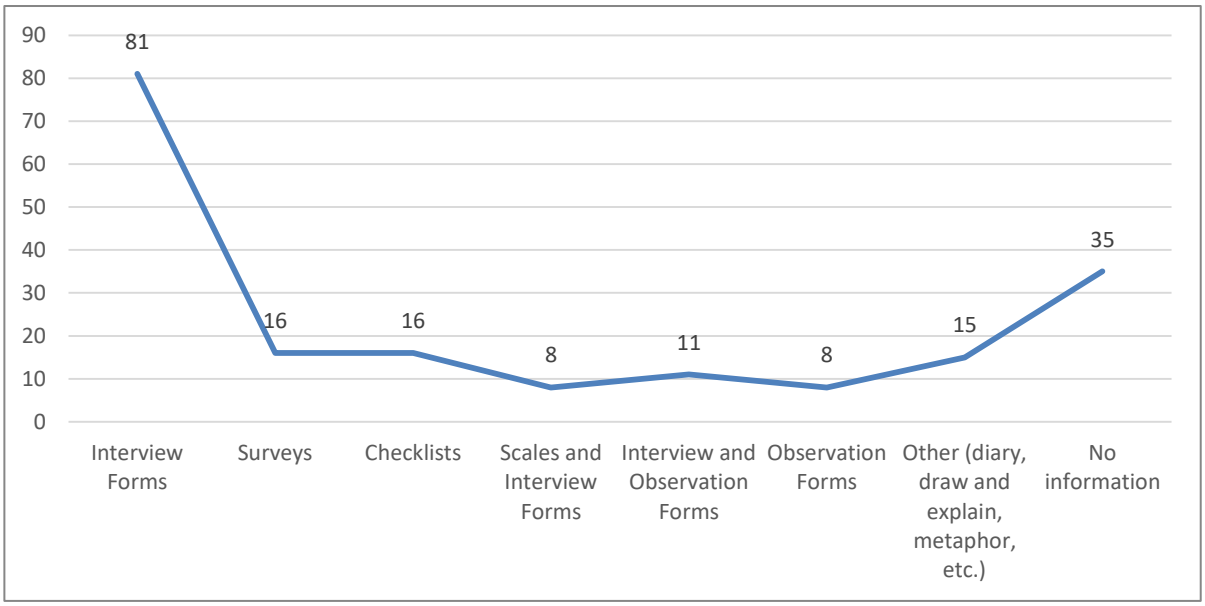

**Graphic 3. Research designs used in the abstracts**

Graphic 3 shows the research designs and the Quantitative research mostly used the screening/descriptive (31%) design; the experimental (8%) designs were very low, and longitudinal studies were not preferred. The qualitative research (30%) generally used the case study design.



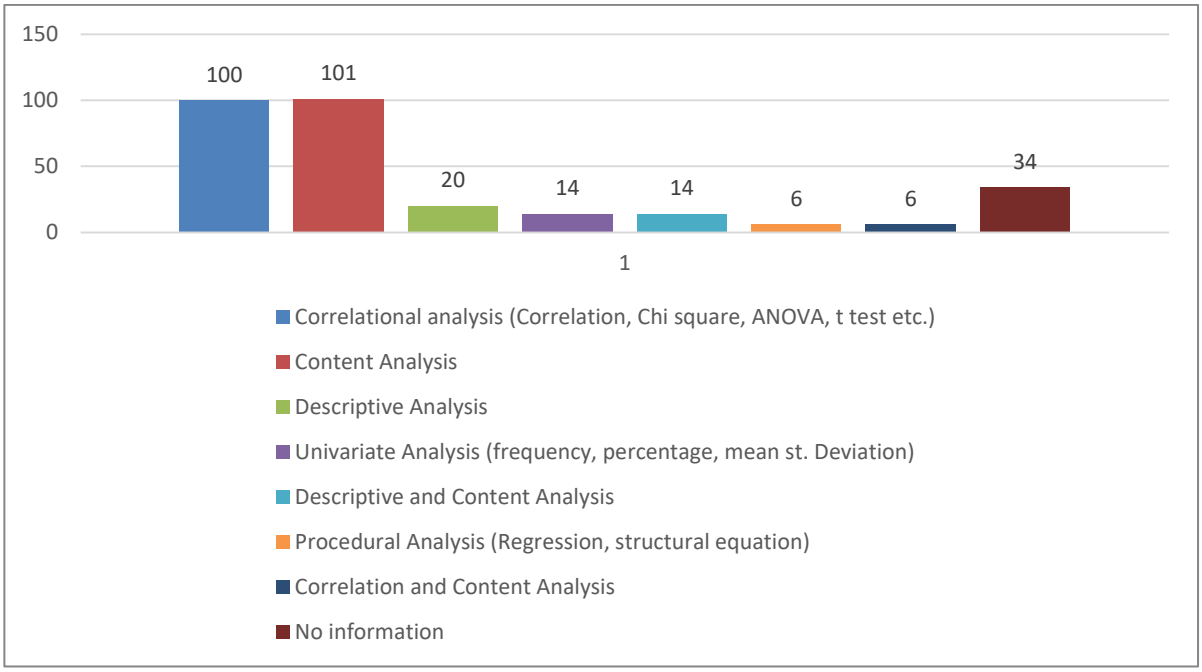

**Graphic 4. Sample groups studied in the abstracts**

As presented in Graphic 4, the sample and study groups analyzed by the scientists in their research mostly included children (79), teachers (59), teacher candidates (36) and parents (28), and they reviewed the documents (38). The number of studies (4) addressing teachers and teacher candidates together and the number of studies (4) on the teachers and administrators were lower. The faculty members (1) was the least studied sample group. Studies (2) were also performed on the social workers that are outside of the preschool education.



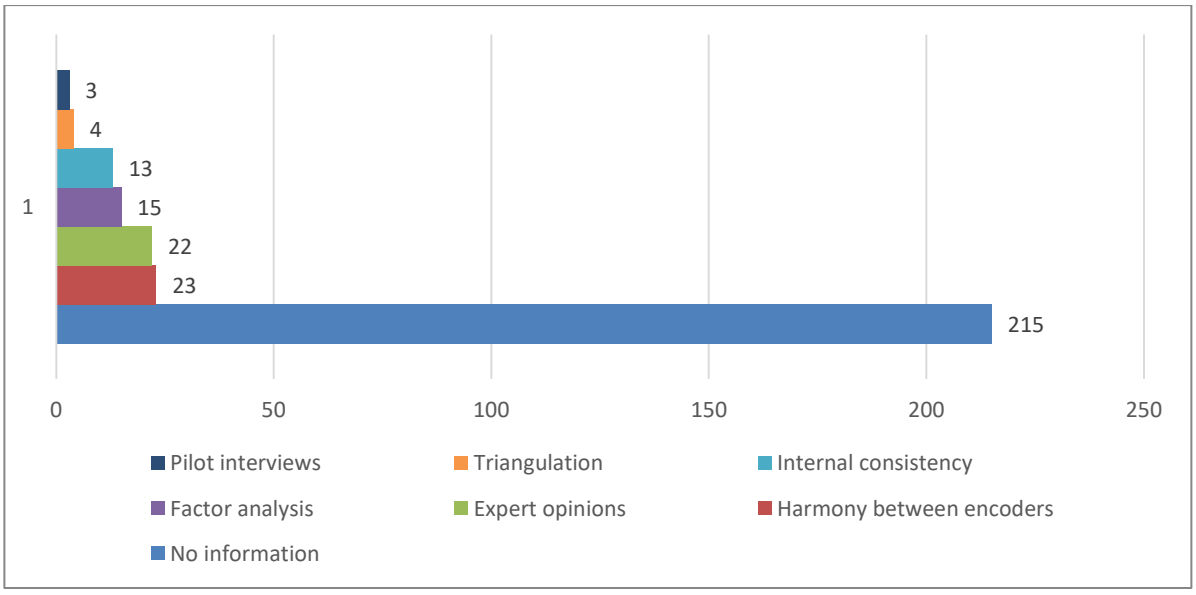

**Graphic 5. Data collection tools used in the abstracts**

As represented in Graphic 5, the scientists studying the preschool education mostly preferred the scales (105) and interview forms (81) as a data collection tool in order to collect data. Some research (35) did not provide any information on the data collection tools. Less research (8) used the scales and interview forms together, and lower number of research used observation forms (8). Some research used data collection techniques such as the diary, and draw and explain (15). Some research (35) did not provide any information on the data collection tools.



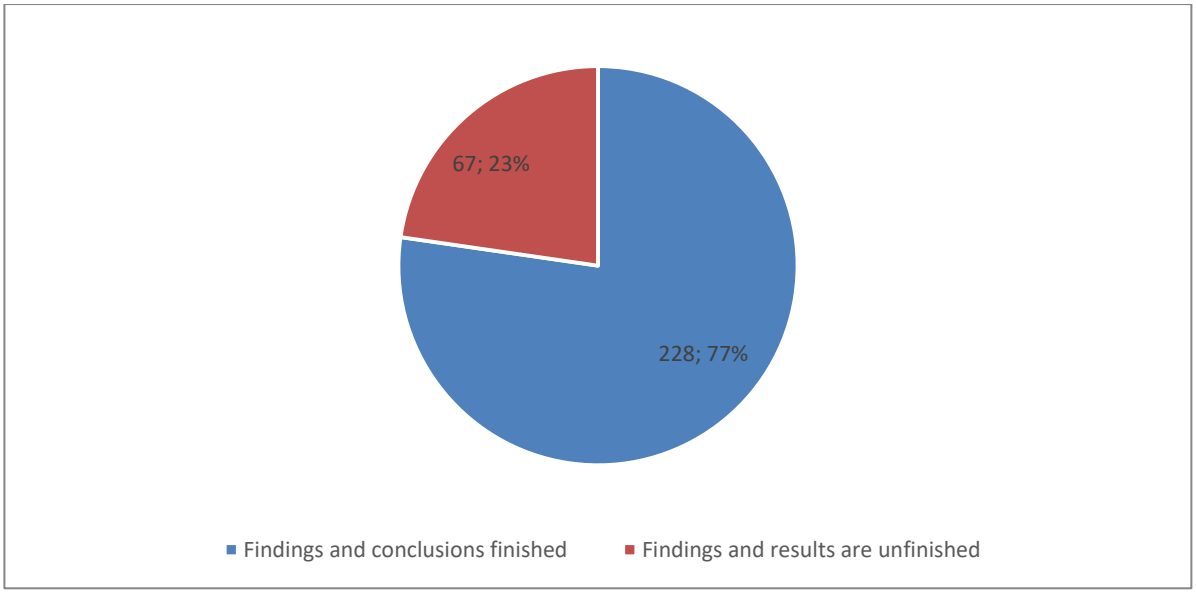

**Graphic 6. Data analysis techniques used in the abstracts**

As represented in Graphic 6, the researchers heavily used the correlational analysis (100) methods, a quantitative analysis technique. The mostly used method was the content analysis (101) for the qualitative analysis. The quantitative analyses did not use advanced analysis techniques very much such as procedural analysis (6). The quantitative research used univariate analysis (14) less. Significant number of abstracts (33) did not provide information on the data analysis technique.




**Graphic 7. Validity and reliability studies in the abstracts**

As presented in Graphic 7, the validity and reliability studies for the presented abstracts were usually not contained in the book of abstracts (215). The abstracts that contained information on the validity and reliability generally focused on the harmony between the encoders (23) and expert opinions (22). The quantitative research used factor analysis (15), especially in the studies that develop a scale.




**Graphic 8. Completed abstracts**

As represented in Graphic 8, a remarkable significant finding in the book of abstracts is that approximately 1/4 of abstracts presented at the congress had unfinished findings and conclusions. In the book of abstracts, there was a higher number of abstracts (228) that had finished findings and conclusions whereas there was a significant number of abstracts (67) that had unfinished findings and conclusions.

## DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

According to this research that reviewed the book of abstracts presented at the International Preschool Education Congress, scientists studying the preschool education mostly chose the development and evaluation, teacher training, educational environments, education programs and policies, family education and participation, media and technology, alternative education models, and immigrants and refugees. The scientists performed less studies on the children at risk, multiculturalism, children's rights and early intervention programs, and they were not really interested in aesthetics, arts, creativity, and drama. Similarly, in their study reviewing the articles on the preschool education, Çifçi & Ersoy (2019) concluded that researchers studied the development, educational materials, methods and techniques used for the education, programs, and involvement of parents. They reported that there were only few studies on the environmental education, special education, sciences and mathematics. In our age, great importance is attached to educate individuals that are creative and produce information in particular. In this respect, insufficient number of abstracts on the creativity, arts, aesthetics and drama can be regarded as a flaw. There was an even distribution among the studies based on the qualitative and quantitative methods in the research of scientists, however, the scientists studying the preschool education were not interested in mixed method. The quantitative research mostly used the screening/descriptive design; the experimental designs were very low, and longitudinal studies were not preferred. The qualitative research generally used the case study design. In their research, Çifçi & Ersoy (2019) concluded that article studies relating to preschool education widely used the non-experimental screening method (a quantitative research method), which supports the findings of this research. They however concluded that articles did not very much used the qualitative research method. A different finding suggested by this research is that researchers use both of the quantitative and qualitative methods for their research. Çifçi &Ersoy (2019) concluded that mixed method was the least preferred method by the researchers, which is similar to the results that we obtained from this research. In their research, Gökçek, Babacan, Kangal, Çakır & Kül (2013) reported that the number of research using mixed method was very low as can be seen in the abstracts presented at the congresses. The research using mixed method can be considered more reliable. However, the researchers do not really choose the mixed method for their research as the mixed method requires

more labor and time, collects data with both qualitative and quantitative methods, and has a longer analysis process. Indeed, Kozikoğlu & Senemoğlu (2016) reviewed the doctorate dissertations in their research and concluded that doctorate dissertations mostly preferred the mixed method. Although scientists do not prefer the mixed method for the abstracts and articles, they choose the mixed method for the doctorate thesis because they labor more and attach more importance to the scientific research methods. In their research, Harris, Mourad, Kadir, Solomon & Young (2007) concluded that the reason for lower rate for publication of abstracts presented at the congress was the procedural weakness rather than the results. Therefore, the methods used must be powerful for the congress to be more quality, and to increase the rate for publication of abstracts presented. Very low number of experimental studies in the presented abstracts and the lack of longitudinal, ethnographic and action studies can be regarded as deficiencies in the use of powerful procedural design. Likewise, Göktaş, Hasançebi, Varışoğlu, Akçay, Bayrak, Baran & Sözbilir (2012) reviewed the articles containing education in their research and suggested that there was a higher number of descriptive studies and there was a very low number of studies such as action research, and thus, shared their opinion that there was a higher number of studies presenting a case in Turkey.

In the samples and study groups studied by the scientists in the research, they mostly studied the children, teachers, teacher candidates and parents, and reviewed the documents. There was a lower number of studies performed on the faculty members and administrators. Çifçi & Ersoy (2019) concluded that the sample of articles on preschool education mostly included the preschool children, teachers and teacher candidates, and the least studied group comprised of the administrators and postgraduates. In their research, Ahi & Kıldan (2013) concluded that the number of studies on the faculty members was lower. The reason why there was a lower number of studies on those groups could be that it is a more difficult process to collect data from the faculty members, administrators, and postgraduates. The widely used data collection tools by the scientists to collect data were the scales and interview forms. Similarly, Şahin & Bartan (2017) concluded that the scale was the mostly used data collection tool. Çifçi & Ersoy (2019) reported that the interview form was the mostly used data collection tool for the articles on the preschool education. Ahi & Kıldan (2013) also reported that the mostly used data collection tools were the surveys and scales in the thesis study on the preschool education. The reason why the researchers prefer more the interview forms and available scales to collect data might be that it is easier to use the interview forms and available scales. It is observed that abstract presented used less the observation forms. Some abstracts used data collection techniques such as the diary, draw and explain, and metaphor. There were also studies that did not provide any information on the data collection tools. The researchers largely used the correlational analysis methods, a quantitative analysis technique. Similarly, Şahin & Bartan (2017) concluded that ANOVA and t-test was the mostly used methods in the studies performed on the preschool education. Ahi & Kıldan (2013) concluded that t-test and ANOVA (parametric tests) was the widely used methods for the statistics in the research. The most used method was the content analysis for the qualitative analysis. The quantitative analyses did not use advanced analysis techniques very much such as procedural analysis. The quantitative research used less the univariate analysis methods. The procedural analysis requires advanced knowledge of statistics and the univariate analysis is not deemed a sufficient analysis in the research, and these two factors may be considered obstacles to being chosen by the researchers. Significant number of abstracts did not contain any information on the data analysis technique. The validity and reliability studies of the presented abstracts were not included in the book of abstracts. Similarly, Bhandari, Devereaux, Guyatt, Cook, Swiontkowski, Sprague & Schemitsch (2002) concluded that the abstracts generally did not contain the required information to assess the validity of research. The abstracts that contain information on the validity and reliability generally focused on the harmony between the encoders and expertise's opinions. The quantitative research used factor analysis, especially in the studies that develop a scale. In their research, Schulte, Huck, Osada, Trost, Lange, Schmidt,... & Bullmann (2012) concluded that 3% of abstracts presented at the congress had been previously presented at another congress, and 7.9% of abstracts were published as a scientific article prior to the congress. They also suggested that some researchers wished to publish their study prior to the conference in order to avoid plagiarism which is a growing problem. Thus, the congress organization board should be careful that presented abstracts have not been presented at other congresses or have not been published as a research article before. In addition, significant number of abstracts submitted to a congress had finished findings and results.

Similarly, in the foreign research, Schulte, Huck, Osada, Trost, Lange, Schmidt,... & Bullmann (2012) concluded that 68.4% of abstracts submitted to the congress comprised of completed scientific studies, and the remaining 31.6% consisted of research that has not yet been completed. In their research, Buchan & Spokes (2010) concluded that scientists tended to present speculative abstracts based on the findings of research under process or on the research findings that have been completely analyzed yet. It is detected that there was an inconsistency between the published research and its abstract presented. Therefore, the congresses may accept abstracts with research process completed in order to avoid such problems. In their research, Bhandari, Devereaux, Guyatt, Cook, Swiontkowski, Sprague & Schemitsch (2002) concluded that 66% of abstracts presented at the congress did not become a scientific article. Although researchers claim that the data would be completed for the abstract to be presented at the congress, acceptance of abstracts with such high level of uncompleted findings and results may pose a problem for the contents of the congress to be scientific. Indeed, in their research, Bhandari, Devereaux, Guyatt, Cook, Swiontkowski, Sprague & Schemitsch (2002) found inconsistencies between the abstract and its published article in the headings, authors, sample size and results.

In conclusion, it could be recommended that researchers working on the preschool education should focus more on the arts, aesthetics, creativity, drama, multiculturalism, children rights and new approaches in preschool education. Furthermore, 21st century skills have become important in our age. Focusing current problems in the field, supporting new approaches and different researches in a holistic manner will increase the quality and efficiency of early childhood studies. This will make a significant contribution to the development of children in early childhood and experts working in the field. Finally, the abstracts submitted to the congress may be selected from the studies with research process completed for the congress to have a higher scientific quality. In addition, the rate for publication of abstracts presented at the congresses as a research article can be shared in order to improve the quality of congresses.

It may be recommended to use mixed method more in the studies. Because in the 21st century, mixed method is a significant design in research methodology around the world (Clark & Creswell, 2008). Preskill stated that "*using a mixed method approach increases the likelihood that the sum of the data collected will be richer, more meaningful, and ultimately more useful in answering the research questions*" (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). In addition to the descriptive statistics, advanced statistics such as correlation, regression and structural equation should be used because advanced statistics allow researches for comparison, evaluation and analysis and they also increase the publication rate of articles in journals (Scherer, Meerpohl, Pfeifer, Schmucker, Schwarzer & von Elm, 2018; Sterne, Gavaghan & Egger, 2000).

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