21st Century Türkiye Maarif Model: Teachers' Opinions on the Renewed Preschool Education Program

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the status of the preschool education program developed based on the 21st Century Türkiye Maarif Model and to analyze the effectiveness of the model through Eisner's Educational Criticism Model. In the research, the qualitative research method was adopted as the model, and the case study design was preferred as the pattern. The study group of the research consists of a total of 15 preschool teachers who provided education to 5-year-old children in public kindergartens in the Kırıkhan district of Hatay province during the 2024–2025 academic year. In the selection of participants, the criterion sampling method was used. A semi-structured interview form was employed as the data collection tool, and the data obtained were analyzed through descriptive analysis and content analysis methods. The data obtained from the research were examined and analyzed within the framework of the four basic dimensions of Eisner's Educational Criticism Model, namely description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematization. The results of the study revealed that teachers evaluated the preschool education programs developed in accordance with the 21st Century Türkiye Maarif Model as innovative programs that respond to the needs of the era, are suitable for the developmental level of children, and support holistic development. The research also yielded findings that certain negative situations were experienced during the implementation of the education program, such as a lack of materials, an insufficient number of activities, and inadequacy of in-service training for teachers. In the study, teachers suggested that for the education program to be implemented more effectively, guidance activities and in-service training should be increased.

Keywords: 21st Century Türkiye Maarif Model, Eisner's Educational Criticism Model, maarif model, preschool education

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Introduction

Development is a systematic, sequential, and holistic process of change and maturation that begins before birth and continues throughout life, manifesting in physical, cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions (Senemoğlu, 2018). According to Yavuzer (2013), this process not only involves biological growth but also encompasses the increase in the individual's capacity to adapt to the environment, the complexity of cognitive functions, the diversification of emotional responses, and the level of interaction with social roles. Throughout the development process, individuals go through various stages such as infancy, early childhood, childhood, and adolescence, while also displaying individual differences. Some of these developmental stages hold more critical importance compared to others (UNESCO, 2018). While developmental stages generally follow a sequential progression from infancy to adolescence, individuals may demonstrate development at different paces and in different forms during these stages.

In the literature, the early childhood period is particularly defined as the most critical and formative stage in terms of development; it is emphasized that this period constitutes the fundamental building blocks that affect the individual's entire life (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The interactions children establish with their environment during this period form the basis of their social, emotional, and cognitive development in later life (Kılıç, 2008). These interactions directly influence not only individual development but also children's ability to integrate into society in the following years. One of the significant approaches explaining this situation is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes that a child's development is shaped through interactions with their immediate environment. Environmental stimuli encountered particularly in the early period play a critical role in determining the child's learning pathways and developmental orientations. Similarly, Malaguzzi's Reggio Emilia Approach considers early childhood not merely as a developmental stage but as the foundation of lifelong learning. In this approach, the child's relationships with the environment are seen as a determining factor in constructing their identity as a learner. In this context, early childhood education is defined as a planned and systematic process that takes into account children's individual differences and holistically supports their affective and cognitive development (NAEYC, 2020).

The quality of educational programs is directly related to the content, learning outcomes, instructional methods, and assessment components designed in accordance with children's developmental needs (UNESCO, 2022). This integrity stands out as a fundamental determinant in creating effective and sustainable learning environments. Particularly in early childhood education, it is of great importance that the programs used are designed in accordance with children's age and developmental levels and are consistent with pedagogical objectives, in order to create effective learning environments (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The effectiveness of educational programs depends on the

quality of learning outcomes, content, teaching methods, and assessment processes, as well as the relationship among these elements (Sarıgöz, 2015). Among these, the proper design of the assessment process is an important factor that enhances the quality of the program. There is a direct relationship between qualified preschool education and the program implemented (Gelişli & Yazıcı, 2012).

In the literature, strong evidence has been obtained that systematically and qualitatively implemented early childhood education programs make significant contributions to children's cognitive, language, motor, self-care, and socio-emotional developmental domains (Aral, Kandır & Yaşar, 2019; Dönger et al., 2016). In this context, preschool education programs should be structured in terms of content, learning outcomes, instructional methods, and assessment processes in a way that aligns with contemporary curriculum development approaches (Demirel, 2021). At this point, it is important that programs be evaluated at regular intervals to determine the extent to which they respond to changing conditions of the era, social expectations, and pedagogical innovations (NAEYC, 2003). However, this evaluation should not only be carried out on the basis of the general structure but also on the basis of more specific topics related to practice. The extent to which educational practices overlap with children's developmental levels and the overall effectiveness of the program in question should be carefully examined (Berk, 2013). According to Berk (2013), early childhood education programs should be prepared in accordance with children's age and developmental levels and should be evaluated based on these criteria. Ginsburg (2007), on the other hand, emphasizes that children's active participation in the process and their motivation toward learning are decisive in evaluating the effectiveness of the program. According to him, children's learning through play and their participation in interactive activities make the learning process more effective while also increasing their interest in learning.

Although children's learning depends on developmental level, curiosity, and interest, the knowledge to be acquired by students must be organized according to a specific system. This system is the curriculum determined or developed by institutions previously established by countries. These programs are developed by commissions carefully selected by the institution. The concept of curriculum development, in its broadest sense, is the process of designing, implementing, evaluating, and reorganizing an educational program based on evaluation data (Erden, 1998). This concept encompasses all coordinated efforts aimed at developing the general objectives of national education and schools, both inside and outside the school, through appropriate methods, techniques, tools, and equipment for content and activities (Varış, 1988). The evaluation process, which is the final and most important stage of curriculum development, is defined as the process of collecting data on the effectiveness of educational programs through observation and various qualified measurement tools, comparing the obtained data with the necessary criteria regarding program effectiveness, interpreting them, and making decisions about the adequacy and effectiveness of the program (Erden, 1998).

The purpose of evaluation is to determine whether the program has achieved its stated objectives and to successfully collect and analyze data to be used in making decisions about the value of the program (Wood, 2001). The aim of the evaluation process in education is to provide feedback to educators and students regarding the program. Program evaluation requires the collection, processing, and interpretation of data related to the educational program. In order to conduct an effective program evaluation, the evaluator must identify the skills that students are expected to acquire at the beginning of school life, the social value of the stated objective, and the cost of the work performed; and then compare the extent to which the outcomes of the educational institution align with the stated objectives. The evaluator's efforts in this direction support the sustainability of the program by ensuring that better decisions are made regarding the program, more qualified programs are developed, and the educational program is used more effectively (Stake, 1967).

Program evaluation models are frameworks used to determine, improve, and measure the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of a program. These models help identify whether the objectives of the program have been achieved. There are many curriculum evaluation models developed by educators or program developers. One of these models is the Educational Criticism Model developed by Eliot W. Eisner.

Elliot W. Eisner's Educational Criticism Model offers a comprehensive, art-based framework for the evaluation of curriculum and instruction. This model emerged as a response to the mechanical and overly objective models that dominated educational evaluations in the mid-20th century. Influenced by aesthetics and the understanding of art, Eisner argued that education should be evaluated like a work of art; it should be understood not only through standard criteria but also through educational intuition and judgment skills (Eisner, 2002, cited in Mutluer & Gürol, 2022, p. 1860). According to him, educational practices can only be holistically understood when both the visible structures and the contextual and meaning-laden dimensions of these structures are considered together. One of the unique aspects of the model is the inclusion of the concept of educational connoisseurship in the evaluation process. For Eisner, this refers to an educator's ability to discern and appreciate subtle nuances within the classroom environment. Just as an art critic interprets a painting through its aesthetic values, the educational expert develops experience, cultural awareness, and observational competence to understand learning processes (Eisner, 2002, p. 63). Indeed, a study conducted by Canbaz and Pesen (2024) indicated that teachers who acquired this competence were able to evaluate programs more effectively in contextual terms.

Eisner also emphasized the importance of expressive objectives in curriculum planning. These objectives are outcomes that are not predetermined but emerge as a result of the learner's interaction with the content. This perspective embodies a degree of openness and creativity more consistent with the nature of learning, as opposed to rigid and predictable behavioral objectives (Eisner, 1994, cited in

Aygören, 2016, p. 3). These objectives are of great significance in fostering curiosity, discovery, and deep understanding in learning. The model consists of four interrelated core dimensions: description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematization (Eisner, 1998, cited in Aykaç, 2022, p. 131). Description aims to present classroom practices in a sensorially rich and detailed manner (Sarıgöz, 2013). Interpretation goes beyond what is visible to analyze the meaning and intentions underlying observed behaviors. Evaluation is the stage in which qualified criteria are employed to determine the quality of the educational experience. Thematization, in turn, aims to derive broader themes and educational values from the data obtained (Çelik & Büyükalan-Filiz, 2018, p. 52). At this stage, each of the four dimensions forming the theoretical basis of the model is explained separately:

Description: The first dimension of the model, description, aims to present the current state of the examined educational program in a detailed and explicit manner. The purpose here is to provide the reader or observer with the opportunity to grasp not only the superficial elements of the environment but also its emotional and cultural contexts (Kramer, 2015). In the description dimension, it is essential that the experiences within the educational environment be conveyed not only with quantitative data but also with sensorial and contextual features. In this dimension, particularly the elements regarding the quality of education are explained with descriptive and direct expressions, reflecting the internal structure of the context (Yüksel, 2010).

Interpretation: The second dimension of the model, interpretation, is the stage in which the analyses of interpretations are carried out to explain how and why the situations presented in the description stage have emerged. In this dimension, inferences are made from the data obtained, and the reasons behind the observed events or situations are explored. The main purpose here is to ensure a multidimensional and in-depth understanding of the processes experienced or to be experienced. The findings obtained through observation and interviews are systematically shared with all stakeholders of the program, providing a participatory perspective to the evaluation process (Marsh, 1992). Although there is no strict boundary between description and interpretation, description focuses on the question of "what happened?" while interpretation seeks to answer the questions of "how did it happen?" and "why did it happen?"

Evaluation: The third dimension of the model, evaluation, involves making judgments about the educational value and functionality of the program based on the data or findings obtained in the previous two dimensions (Aygören & Er, 2018). In this dimension, the importance and meanings of the events and activities examined are analyzed and interpreted in depth (Marsh, 1992). Furthermore, it is emphasized at this stage that the purpose of education is not only to change individuals but also to enhance their skills of living together and to socialize them. Therefore, the evaluation dimension plays a critical role in understanding the extent to which previously determined educational experiences serve the previously determined objectives (Işık, 2015).

Thematization: The final and most novel dimension of the model, thematization, has been developed in a sense for the higher-level conceptualization of Educational Criticism. In this dimension of the model, themes that have emerged and been repeated in the previous dimensions are identified, and the thematization process is carried out. In this process, comprehensive and holistic evaluations of teaching are presented to stakeholders. Thus, a deeper understanding is developed concerning the meaning of teaching for students, along with the interpretation and analysis of the educational environment (Eisner, 1994). The thematization dimension also aims to reveal the transformative and constructive potential of educational evaluation.

Ultimately, a continuous monitoring and evaluation system is needed to assess the effectiveness of preschool education programs. This system should not only serve to measure the overall success of the implemented program but also provide constructive information aimed at improving the quality of the program. Therefore, preschool education programs should be analyzed not only at the level of content but also in terms of implementation processes and evaluation dimensions in a multidimensional manner. Accordingly, teachers' opinions constitute an important source of data in identifying the practical reflections of the program in the field as well as its strengths and weaknesses. Patton (2002) states that evaluation processes are indispensable for the continuous development of educational systems and the programs developed in relation to these systems. Therefore, this study aims to determine the extent to which preschool education programs respond to the requirements of the 21st Century Türkiye Maarif Model by focusing on the experiences and observations of preschool teachers.

The Research Problem

The present century requires individuals not only to be equipped with academic knowledge but also to effectively develop higher-order skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, collaborative communication, and digital literacy. Accordingly, in order to equip individuals with these skills, it is necessary to restructure and continuously improve education systems, curricula, and instructional programs. Early childhood, which is one of the most critical periods in terms of development and in which the foundations of the individual's holistic development are laid, holds vital importance in the acquisition of 21st-century skills. The fundamental element that determines the educational quality of this period is preschool teachers, who are the practitioners of early childhood education. Therefore, examining teachers' perceptions of contemporary educational models and their experiences in implementation processes will make significant contributions to the literature. Within this framework, it has been deemed necessary to conduct this study in order to reveal preschool teachers' attitudes and perceptions regarding the new maarif model developed in the light of 21st-century skills, their opinions on the applicability of the model, and the potential challenges they encounter in the implementation process. The study aims to fill the gap in the literature by focusing on how this model is perceived and evaluated by preschool teachers.

In this respect, the problem statement of the research is to evaluate the current status of the Preschool Education Programs developed on the basis of the 21st Century Türkiye Maarif Model and to analyze the effectiveness of the model through Eisner's Educational Criticism Model. The sub-problems of the research are determined as follows:

1. **Description:** How do preschool teachers perceive the outputs and indicators of the renewed preschool education program of the 21st century in terms of planning, implementation processes, and evaluation dimensions?

2. **Interpretation:** What are the views of preschool teachers regarding the applicability of the activities included in the renewed preschool education program within the scope of the 21st Century Maarif Model? What are the main challenges faced by teachers during these implementations?

3. **Evaluation:** According to preschool teachers, what are the strengths of the renewed preschool education program within the scope of the 21st Century Maarif Model? Which aspects of the renewed program are open to improvement?

4. **Thematization:** What are the teachers' suggestions for the development of the renewed preschool education program within the scope of the 21st Century Maarif Model?

Purpose and Significance of the Research

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the renewed preschool education program, which was designed in accordance with the 21st Century Maarif Model, on the basis of Eisner's Educational Criticism evaluation model. The renewed preschool education model of the Century of Türkiye, developed by the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Türkiye, represents a comprehensive program transformation that supports the holistic development of the individual in accordance with human nature and is based on a value-oriented educational approach (MoNE, 2024). The developmental stages experienced in early childhood hold characteristic importance for the individual's future. Therefore, the implementation and evaluation of preschool education models in this period bear critical significance for the future of countries.

Within the scope of the research, it is also aimed to conduct an in-depth examination of preschool teachers' views regarding the renewed preschool education model of the Century of Türkiye and to reveal the reflections of this program in practice. In this context, the findings obtained are considered to provide significant contributions to program evaluation studies carried out in the field of preschool education. Moreover, the study also constitutes a unique and up-to-date resource in terms of updating teacher education programs and developing supportive practices to be planned for preschool education.

Limitations of the Research

This study is limited to the renewed preschool education program based on the 21st Century Türkiye Maarif Model. The participants of the research consist of a total of 15 preschool teachers working as preschool teachers in public schools in the Kırıkhan district of Hatay province. Within the scope of the study, only the individual opinions and suggestions of preschool teachers were taken into consideration; the views of parents, students, and other teachers were not included. As the data collection tool, only a semi-structured interview form was used. Since the study was conducted on the basis of a qualitative research design, the findings obtained do not aim for generalizability but instead seek to provide in-depth and descriptive information on the subject.

Assumptions of the Research

The participation of the participants in the research is based on voluntariness. The participating teachers provided honest and sincere responses to the interview questions. The semi-structured interview form used as the data collection tool provides valid and reliable information appropriate to the purpose of the research. Teachers' views on the program present a general framework regarding the applicability of the curriculum in practice. Eisner's Educational Criticism evaluation model offers a suitable theoretical framework for evaluating the renewed preschool education program of the 21st Century Türkiye Maarif Model.

Method

In this section of the research, the subsections related to the research method—namely, the research design, participants, data collection tools, and data analysis—are presented in order.

Research Design

This study was structured using the case study design, one of the qualitative research methods. According to Yin (2018), a case study is a qualitative research approach in which an event, individual, group, or process is examined in depth and detail. Similarly, Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013) state that it is a comprehensive form of inquiry that seeks answers to the questions of "how?" and "why?" with regard to one or more phenomena, situations, groups, activities, or programs occurring within a specific time frame. In this context, a holistic single-case design was adopted in the study to evaluate the preschool education program within the framework of Eisner's Educational Criticism Model. The design employed in the study allows the preschool education program under examination to be addressed in all its aspects in line with its theoretical foundations and enables holistic and in-depth explanations within the context.

Participants

The study group of the research was determined using the criterion sampling technique, one of the purposive sampling methods. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling that allows for an in-depth and detailed examination of situations determined in accordance with the purpose of the research. Criterion sampling, one of the subtypes of this method, is based on selecting appropriate units according to predetermined criteria (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Accordingly, the study group consists of a total of 15 preschool teachers working in public kindergartens and preschool classes affiliated with primary schools in the Kırıkhan district of Hatay province during the 2024–2025 academic year.

Data Collection Tools

In this study, semi-structured interviews were preferred as the data collection tool. In the social sciences, particularly in philosophy-based studies, the method of obtaining data through semi-structured interviews is considered an effective tool for understanding individuals' intellectual and emotional inner worlds. As emphasized by Patton (2002), interviews conducted using this method are highly suitable for revealing individuals' experiences, thoughts, and feelings in depth. The interview form used in the study was prepared on the basis of the four core components of the Educational Criticism Model, which is one of the program evaluation approaches: description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematization. The questions were planned in a content-related and logical sequence reflecting the structural integrity of these four core axes.

In order to ensure the validity of the interview form to be used as a data collection tool, expert evaluation was also sought. The draft form, prepared by the researchers, was reviewed by three faculty members working in the field of curriculum and instruction in terms of content and scope. As a result of the feedback from the faculty members, it was confirmed that the questions were clear and comprehensible. However, the faculty members suggested revising some of the items in the form to obtain more detailed information. In line with these suggestions, the necessary revisions were made by the researchers, and the final version of the interview form was produced. During the data collection phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 15 teachers working in preschool education institutions. The data obtained were analyzed using qualitative data analysis methods in accordance with the purpose of the research.

Data Analysis

In this study, the data obtained from interviews conducted with participants on a voluntary basis were analyzed using the content analysis method. Content analysis is a technique used to identify similar data and reveal the relationships among them, aiming to gather the obtained data around specific concepts and themes, transform them into a form understandable to the reader, and provide in-depth interpretation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). According to Demirel (2019), content analysis is a method

that aims to achieve meaningful results through the systematic analysis of written or oral materials. Prior to the interviews, appointments were arranged with voluntary participants by planning appropriate times, places, and dates in order not to cause any inconvenience to them. During the interviews, permission was obtained from the participants to make audio or video recordings in order to prevent data loss. In cases where participants did not permit audio or video recordings, detailed notes were taken by the researcher during the interview. In situations where the answers to the questions in the form were insufficient, additional questions were posed to participants to deepen and clarify their responses. During the data analysis process, the data obtained through audio and video recording devices were transferred to a computer environment and transformed into written documents. The data obtained through note-taking were carefully read and categorized into themes based on key concepts and expressions. In the study, the data obtained were organized and interpreted in accordance with the research questions using the descriptive analysis method. Descriptive analysis aims to systematically organize the obtained data in line with predetermined themes and present them to the reader in a clear and comprehensible manner (Karasar, 2022). The data obtained from the interviews conducted with teachers were organized and grouped into themes in line with the sub-problems of the research. During the process of forming the themes, the opinions of faculty members were also consulted in order to ensure the reliability of the research.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Teachers Participating in the Research

Demographic Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	13	86.6
	Male	2	13.3
Place of employment	Kırıkhan	15	100
Educational status	Bachelor's degree	15	100
Professional seniority	1-5 years	15	100

When Table 1 is examined, it is observed that among the preschool teachers whose opinions were collected regarding the renewed preschool education program based on the 21st Century Türkiye Maarif Model, 13 were female and 2 were male. The reason for the higher number of female teachers is due to the greater number of women graduating from preschool teaching programs in our country and the tendency of men to turn to other professions instead of preschool teaching. All of the teachers participating in the study are a total of 15 preschool teachers working in schools located in the Kırıkhan district of Hatay province. It was determined that all participating teachers had received education at the bachelor's degree level and that their professional seniority ranged between 1 and 5 years.

Semi-Structured Interview Form Questions

1.   **Question:** How would you describe your interaction with children in the classroom and your approach toward their individual differences? (Description dimension)

2.   **Question:** How do you generally evaluate the applications of the new maarif model in preschool education? Could you mention the strengths and weaknesses of these applications? (Interpretation dimension)

3.   **Question:** When you observe the learning processes in your classroom, which moments stand out as contributing to the development of 21st-century skills? (Evaluation dimension)

4.   **Question:** Based on your experiences regarding the new maarif model, what do you think is the most fundamental message of the model concerning preschool education? (Thematic dimension)

5.   **Question:** Considering the applicability and effectiveness of the new maarif model in preschool education, what are your views and suggestions for the improvement of the preschool curriculum?

Results

In this section, the data obtained from individual interviews conducted with preschool teachers were analyzed in line with the four fundamental stages of the Educational Criticism Model: description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematization. While presenting the data, direct quotations from participants' views that best reflect the relevant situation, as well as participant codes not repeated in the frequency data, were included. In order to ensure that participants did not encounter any problems, the identities of the teachers were kept confidential; female teachers were coded as "ÖK1, ÖK2, ÖK3… ÖK15," and male teachers were coded as "ÖE1, ÖE2, ÖE3… ÖE15."

Findings Related to the Description Dimension of Eisner's Educational Criticism Model

Within the scope of the description dimension of the Educational Criticism Model, teachers' opinions were utilized in order to determine the current status, the quality of the program, and teachers' perceptions regarding the renewed preschool education program of the 21st Century Maarif Education Model. Based on the responses given to the question directed to teachers, *"How would you describe your interaction with children in the classroom and your approach toward their individual differences? Please explain."* the data obtained were coded and presented in tabular form in Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers' Opinions on the Description Dimension of the Educational Criticism Model

Code	Participant	Frequency
Respect for individual differences	ÖK1, ÖK2, ÖK3, ÖK4, ÖK5, ÖK6, ÖK7, ÖK8, ÖK9, ÖK10, ÖK11, ÖK12, ÖK13, ÖE14, ÖE15	15
Supporting holistic development	ÖK2, ÖK7, ÖK8, ÖK12, ÖK13	5
Love- and respect-based approach	ÖK3, ÖK6, ÖK9, ÖK11, ÖE15	5

When Table 1 is examined, from the answers given by preschool teachers to the question related to the description dimension, three different themes were created: respect for individual differences, supporting holistic development, and a love- and respect-based approach. When the created themes were analyzed, it was determined that 15 teachers, that is, all of them, stated that the preschool education program demonstrated an approach appropriate to individual differences. Five teachers expressed the opinion that the preschool education program supports holistic development, while five teachers stated that it demonstrates a love- and respect-based approach. It was found that the majority of teachers who expressed opinions regarding the description dimension of the preschool education program within the framework of the 21st Century Maarif Model and Eisner's Educational Criticism Model reported positive views.

Some of the preschool teachers stated:

ÖK11: *"...I can describe myself as a teacher who observes to recognize children's individual differences and plans education according to these differences. I define myself as a teacher who has certain boundaries with children and carries out communication with them within the framework of tolerance..."*

ÖK2: *"...While some children work more creatively and independently, some need more guidance. Therefore, sometimes I try to respond to each child's needs by carrying out individual studies within the group..."*

ÖK13: *"...During activities, I aim to develop not only children's academic skills but also their social skills. I encourage them to cooperate with each other during group activities."*

ÖE1: *"...I can describe it as a love-based, supportive, and guiding framework. I know that every child has a unique learning style, area of interest, and pace of development, and I plan my activities accordingly."*

ÖK3: *"...I see the individual differences in children as the color they bring to the classroom, and I always support them in adapting to the class in line with their differences without changing their*

identities. In addition to everything else I mentioned, I always try to approach them within the framework of love and respect."

In this way, they expressed their views. The majority of teachers stated that they acknowledged each child has different developmental needs and that they shaped their classroom interactions by taking these differences into account. Individual differences directly affect the teaching methods and material choices applied by teachers. This situation reveals that teachers apply different strategies according to children's learning speeds, interests, and skills. Teachers expressed that they attach importance not only to the development of children's academic skills but also to their social skills, and that through activities such as group work, games, and sharing, they support both the academic and social development of children.

Findings Related to the Interpretation Dimension of Eisner's Educational Criticism Model

In the interpretation dimension, which constitutes the second stage of Eisner's Educational Criticism Model, evaluations were made in order to clarify how and why the educational process progresses in this way. In this context, the opinions of preschool teachers regarding the interpretation dimension of Eisner's Educational Criticism Model were consulted in relation to the preschool education program developed within the framework of the 21st Century Maarif Model. During the interviews, the teachers were asked the question: *"How do you generally evaluate the applications of the new education model at the preschool level? Could you mention the strengths and weaknesses of these applications?"* Based on the answers they provided, the data obtained were coded and tabulated, and are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Teachers' Opinions on the Interpretation Dimension of the Educational Criticism Model

Code	Participant	Frequency
Supporting multidimensional and holistic development	ÖK1, ÖK2, ÖK3, ÖK4, ÖK5, ÖK6, ÖK7, ÖK8, ÖK9, ÖK10, ÖK11, ÖK12, ÖK13, ÖE14, ÖE15	15
Student-centered education	ÖK8, ÖK10, ÖK14, ÖE15	4
Lack of materials	ÖK6, ÖK7, ÖK10, ÖE15	4
Our values	ÖK2, ÖK3, ÖK12, ÖK13	4

When Table 2 is examined, as a result of the answers given by the preschool teachers interviewed to the question related to the interpretation dimension, four different themes were created: supporting multidimensional and holistic development, student-centered education, lack of materials, and our values. All of the teachers participating in the study stated that the preschool education program

developed in accordance with the New Maarif Model supports multidimensional and holistic development, while 4 mentioned that it is student-centered, 4 mentioned the lack of materials, and another 4 stated that it prioritizes values.

The majority of teachers expressed positive opinions about the preschool education program developed according to the Maarif Model, as it addresses children's cognitive, affective, and social development in a holistic manner. Some of the opinions of preschool teachers on this issue are as follows:

ÖK4: *"...I find the skill-based approach of the new maarif model, which places the child at the center, to be positive, and I also think that the play-based learning included in the model is suitable for the nature of preschool and aligns with children's natural ways of learning."*

ÖK9: *"...I can say that more importance has been given to daily life skills, but the maarif model is not a model implemented with consideration for every region. The reason for this may be the deficiencies in the pilot implementations."*

ÖE14: *"...Although it is explained in the model, I think there is a lack of sufficient practical examples and plans regarding how we are supposed to implement it."*

ÖK2: *"...I think the model has been introduced in a very superficial way, and as teachers, we need more comprehensive seminars and workshops. Since it is a new program, it will take time for it to be implemented."*

ÖK13: *"...I think it is very important that one of the prominent elements of the model is to instill values such as virtue, responsibility, compassion, and justice. Because the Turkish nation is a society that inherently embodies these characteristics."*

ÖK5: *"...Introducing children to these values at an early age plays an important role both in improving their classroom behavior and in raising individuals who are beneficial to society."*

Teachers also expressed negative opinions, stating that the new education program does not cover all regions of the country and that certain disruptions occurred in the implementation processes. Regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the model, teachers stated that the strengths of the program outweigh its weaknesses. However, some teachers indicated that although the program is strong in theory, it does not provide sufficient materials and activity examples for practical implementation.

Teachers' Opinions on the Evaluation Dimension of Eisner's Educational Criticism Model

The evaluation dimension, which constitutes the third stage of Eisner's Educational Criticism Model, aims to reveal the educational value of the described and interpreted educational experiences. This dimension involves an analytical evaluation process that seeks to explain "why what is good is good, and why what is lacking is insufficient." In this framework, the opinions of preschool teachers

regarding the evaluation dimension of Eisner's Educational Criticism Model were obtained within the scope of the renewed preschool education program developed in accordance with the 21st Century Maarif Model. In this context, based on the answers given by teachers to the question, *"When you observe the learning processes taking place in your classroom, which moments, in your opinion, most support 21st-century skills?"* the data obtained were coded and tabulated, and are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Teachers' Opinions on the Evaluation Dimension of the Educational Criticism Model

Code	Participant	Frequency
Problem solving and collaboration-based communication	ÖK1, ÖK2, ÖK3, ÖK4, ÖK5, ÖK6, ÖK7, ÖK8, ÖK9, ÖK10, ÖK11, ÖK12, ÖK13, ÖE14, ÖE15	15
Development of creativity	ÖK1, ÖK5, ÖK6, ÖK9, ÖK13, ÖE15	6
Technology literacy	ÖK1, ÖK4, ÖK11	3

When Table 3 is examined, as a result of the answers given by the preschool teachers participating in the study to the question related to the evaluation dimension, three different themes were created: problem solving and collaboration-based communication, development of creativity, and technology literacy. All of the teachers expressed the opinion that the renewed preschool education program emphasizes problem solving and collaboration-based communication, while 6 teachers stated that it emphasizes the development of creativity, and 3 teachers stated that it emphasizes technology literacy.

Some of the opinions of preschool teachers on this issue are as follows:

ÖE6: *"...While playing block games, when children build a tower together, they decide together who will place which piece and where. They argue, but in the end, they reach a common decision. I think this situation is a real communication skill. I believe that solving problems together is a very important skill."*

ÖE14: *"...A child can turn anything they get their hands on into an art material. From a box they make a robot, from a plastic bottle a bird, from a roll a bee, and they can come up with many more activities. I do not want to limit their creativity and I support it."*

ÖE15: *"...Some research shows that when children work with natural materials without being too dependent on technology, it enhances their creativity and critical thinking skills. In line with this, I plan games and activities with materials I collect from nature. I think it is possible to support children's development even without technological tools such as smart boards. I believe that the tactile materials, games, and crafts I prepare for my students contribute to their concentration skills."*

ÖK9: *"...Children show great interest in interactive stories on the smart board. Their focus and attention improve, and at the same time, they can interact with the content."*

The majority of preschool teachers participating in the research stated that they observed children making progress in problem-solving and collaboration-based skills. Teachers particularly noted that in processes such as visual art activities and design activities using recycled materials, children generated original ideas, developed different perspectives, and exhibited aesthetic sensitivity, that is, the development of creativity. Teachers also expressed that even in environments with limited technology use, when children are directed to digital content through smart boards, educational applications, or digital stories, they were able to concentrate and become familiar with basic digital literacy skills. Teachers also mentioned that the smart board supports technological literacy.

Teachers' Opinions on the Thematization Dimension of Eisner's Educational Criticism Model

In the thematization dimension, which constitutes the final stage of the Educational Criticism Model, teachers' opinions were consulted in order to examine whether the renewed preschool education program, developed in accordance with the 21st Century Maarif Model, possesses thematic integrity, that is, whether it is structured around a specific theme, main idea, or conceptual framework. In the thematization dimension of Eisner's Educational Criticism Model, based on the question asked, *"In line with your experiences regarding the new maarif model, what do you think is the most fundamental message of the model concerning preschool education?"* the data obtained from the answers were coded and tabulated, and are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Teachers' Opinions on the Thematization Dimension of the Educational Criticism Model

Code	Participant	Frequency
Education appropriate to individual differences	ÖK1, ÖK2, ÖK3, ÖK5, ÖK6, ÖK7, ÖK8, ÖK9, ÖK10, ÖK11, ÖK12, ÖK13, ÖE14	13
Supporting holistic development	ÖK1, ÖK5, ÖK7, ÖK12, ÖE14, ÖE15	6
Active participation	ÖK3, ÖK4, ÖK8, ÖK13, ÖK15	5

When Table 4 is examined, as a result of the answers given by the preschool teachers participating in the research to the question related to the thematization dimension, three different themes were created: education appropriate to individual differences, supporting holistic development, and active participation. Thirteen teachers stated that the preschool education program developed within the framework of the new Maarif Model is a program appropriate to individual differences, 6 teachers

stated that it supports holistic development, and 5 teachers expressed that it is supportive of active participation.

ÖK10: *"...I can summarize it as adopting the idea that each child is unique, special, and one of a kind, and planning their interests, needs, and requirements accordingly."*

ÖK6: *"...In the new Maarif Model, helping the child to develop their existing potential by paying attention to individual differences comes to the forefront. Thanks to the skill-based approach, it supports children both academically and socially."*

ÖK8: *"...The Maarif Model offers us the opportunity to do much more than just implement ready-made plans. We can adapt the activities around the theme according to ourselves, and we can shift direction based on the children's interests. This also nourishes my creativity. For example, while working on the theme of 'space,' the children suddenly said, 'we want to make a rocket.' Although it was not in the plan, I gathered the materials right there and we built a rocket together. This flexibility not only makes the process more efficient but also increases my professional satisfaction."*

ÖK4: *"...In the past, topics were passed over quickly without much emphasis. But with the new Maarif Model, when a theme is studied repeatedly with different activities, children both enjoy it and retain what they have learned. For instance, in the 'healthy eating' theme, we read a story, made a fruit salad, and organized a market visit. The children not only learned the names of the fruits but also recognized them, tasted them, and learned to choose them. The knowledge they gained in this process becomes much more permanent because they learn everything by experiencing it."*

ÖK3: *"...It has ensured that children take an active role in society by basing the model on learning by doing and experiencing, and by including family and community in education. At the same time, an education appropriate to individual differences has been designed."*

In this way, they expressed their views. The majority of teachers participating in the study stated that the renewed preschool education program emphasizes education appropriate to individual differences. Teachers indicated that the new program encourages holistic learning in children, supports learning by addressing different developmental areas together, and that the themes in the program add meaning to learning. Some teachers also stated that active participation resulting from the program made learning more permanent. Based on the opinions of preschool teachers, it was determined that the thematization dimension of Eisner's Educational Criticism Model is effectively reflected in the preschool curriculum developed on the basis of the Maarif Model. The importance of this dimension is emphasized in the program, particularly in terms of supporting holistic development, providing education appropriate to individual differences, and offering meaningful and life-related learning environments through active participation. The most fundamental message of the program is that it

presents an approach that encourages in-depth and interdisciplinary learning through themes that center on the child's development.

Teachers' Opinions and Suggestions for the Improvement of the Education Program

Based on the question, *"Considering the applicability and effectiveness of the renewed preschool education program within the framework of the 21st Century Maarif Model, what are your opinions and suggestions for the improvement of this implementation?"* the data obtained from the responses were coded and tabulated, and are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Teachers' Opinions on the Improvement of the Preschool Education Program

Code	Participant	Frequency
Lack of resources and materials	ÖK3, ÖK4, ÖK5, ÖK6, ÖK7, ÖK8, ÖK11, ÖK12, ÖK13, ÖE14, ÖE15	11
Informative trainings	ÖK1, ÖK3, ÖK5, ÖK7, ÖK8, ÖK9, ÖK10, ÖK12, ÖE14, ÖE15	10
School-family cooperation	ÖK2, ÖK3, ÖK5, ÖK7, ÖK8, ÖK9, ÖK10, ÖK12	8

When Table 5 is examined, as a result of the answers given by preschool teachers who were interviewed to the question regarding their opinions and suggestions for the improvement of the program, considering the applicability and effectiveness of the renewed preschool education program, three different themes were created: lack of resources and materials, informative trainings, and school-family cooperation. Eleven teachers mentioned the lack of resources and materials, ten teachers spoke about the insufficiency of informative trainings regarding the model, and eight teachers emphasized the importance of school-family cooperation.

ÖK5: *"...In order for the model to be implemented more effectively, I think that in-service trainings for teachers should be increased, examples of practice should be shared, and material support should be strengthened."*

ÖE15: *"...In the training where the model was explained, very good information was provided; however, materials to support the practice were not provided. I think this makes sustainability difficult."*

ÖK7: *"...First of all, comprehensive and continuous professional development programs are needed for teachers to fully understand the basic approach and achievements of the model. In order to ensure consistency in practice, it is important that supportive materials such as guide documents, sample plans, and activity booklets be widely delivered to the field."*

ÖK1: *"...I suggest that more comprehensive trainings, seminars, and workshops should be provided for teachers and educators."*

ÖE14: *"...I can give examples of its strong features, such as the child-centered approach, supporting holistic development, and play-based learning. However, we should also mention its challenges, such as lack of resources and materials, and the insufficiency of teacher informative trainings."*

ÖK5: *"...In order for the model to be implemented more effectively, I think that in-service trainings for teachers should be increased, examples of practice should be shared, and material support should be strengthened. In addition, increasing parental cooperation and ensuring the active participation of families in the child's developmental process will support the success of the model."*

ÖK8: *"...In order for the model to be understandable, more educational seminars and workshop support should be provided for teachers. In order to ensure effective implementation, there should be a sufficient number of materials available in the classroom. Trainings should also be organized to increase school-family cooperation in order to enhance the effectiveness of the model and its impact on children."*

In this way, they expressed their opinions. In the research, the majority of teachers referred to the lack of resources and materials. Teachers stated that in-service trainings related to the preschool education program should be provided not only to preschool teachers but also to administrators, so that an education program supported by both teachers and administrators would ensure a more holistic success throughout the school. Teachers emphasized that thanks to the modular and flexible structure of the curriculum, it could be adapted to different school types and needs, and that this situation would both increase student achievement and facilitate the work of teachers. The majority of teachers stated that continuous in-service informative trainings should be provided by the Provincial Directorates of National Education. Teachers emphasized the importance of school-family cooperation, underlining that strong ties should be established between the school and families, and that continuous cooperation should be ensured between school and family.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Discussion and Conclusion

In the study, the opinions of preschool teachers regarding the renewed preschool education program within the framework of the 21st Century Maarif Model were evaluated within the scope of Eisner's Educational Criticism Model. In the research, the renewed preschool education program was compared with studies published in the literature, and recommendations were also provided for both practitioners and researchers.

Depending on current conditions, the rapid changes and transformations occurring in many areas such as social, cultural, economic, and technology differentiate the knowledge and skills that individuals are required to have, necessitate the acquisition of values through natural methods, and require that tendencies be utilized in different ways (MoNE, 2024). This situation has made it necessary to raise individuals who possess 21st-century competencies. Accordingly, starting from 2024, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) began to redesign and prepare the curricula of all courses. One of the first renewed curricula has been the preschool education programs.

When the renewed preschool education program, based on the 21st Century Maarif Model, is evaluated within the framework of Eisner's Educational Criticism Evaluation Model, it was concluded from the opinions of teachers in the study that the renewed program provided students with skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy.

In the research, teachers stated that factors such as class size, lack of materials, school-family cooperation, and teacher competencies limited the effectiveness of the program. In a study conducted by Bekiroğlu and Ütkür-Güllühan (2024), it was concluded that the learning outcomes of the preschool education program developed in accordance with the Türkiye Century Maarif Model were appropriate to the developmental level and value-centered. In the same study, it was also stated that although the program seemed excellent in theory, it especially challenged teachers in the evaluation process and in the implementation of skill forms. Likewise, in a study conducted by Ertek-Eroğlu, Eker, and Eker (2025), it was stated that while the majority of teachers welcomed the theoretical framework of the model positively, they encountered various difficulties in the implementation process. Based on these results, it can be said that the renewed preschool education program partially limited students and somewhat challenged teachers in practice.

In the study, teachers particularly drew attention to problems such as the inadequacy of implementation tools and the difficulty of classroom integration. Therefore, it was concluded in the research that there was a lack of materials in preschool classrooms. In addition, in the study, teachers emphasized that in order to implement the renewed preschool education program developed within the framework of the Maarif Model more effectively, they developed various strategies, but the curriculum often remained limited to individual effort and creativity. Therefore, it was concluded in the study that more effective strategies should be developed in preschool education programs to support individual effort and creativity.

In the study, teachers stated that they considered the skills targeted by the curriculum important and a requirement of the contemporary era; however, due to certain structural and systemic problems related to practice, these goals were not sufficiently realized in the field. Therefore, it was concluded in the study that the objectives of the preschool education program should be reorganized based on teachers' opinions.

In the study, it was found from teachers' views that the fact that some skills in the curriculum were presented in a ready-made structure weakened the sense of ownership in practice, caused teachers not to actively participate in the process, and led them to display reluctant and insecure attitudes during implementation. In addition, the lack of sufficient guidance and resources in the program to support teachers' professional development has caused the model to be perceived only as a new approach and has made it difficult for practitioners to internalize the model. Therefore, it was concluded in the study that the ready-made skills should be reorganized according to the constructivist approach or indexed to individual skill.

In the study, based on teachers' opinions, it was concluded that although the curriculum was adopted as a requirement of contemporary education, this model was not fully functional in current educational environments. Teachers emphasized that the curriculum presents a strong vision in theory and that it is also important to instill skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and technology literacy in children at an early age. However, they stated that some of the content was insufficient for these skills to be realized in practice. Teachers concluded that inequalities in educational environments and uncertainties in the implementation process limited the effectiveness of the program. Therefore, it was concluded in the study that the content should be revised in order for some skills to be acquired.

In the study, teachers regarded the curriculum as a holistic orientation in which children's life skills for the future are constructed. In a study conducted by Mutluer and Gürol (2022), it was also stated that addressing recurring patterns and emphases in the educational environment in a systematic way would provide a holistic evaluation of the program. Teachers noted that the curriculum would not only enhance academic achievement but also promote socialization, productivity, collaboration, communication, and creativity. Therefore, it was concluded in the study that the preschool education program imparted 21st-century skills to the individual.

In the study, based on teachers' opinions, it was determined that the preschool education program supports the holistic development of the individual and is associated with daily life. Reports prepared by UNICEF (2021) and UNESCO (2023) also emphasize that preschool education programs should be designed to support the holistic development of the child, be related to daily life, and be based on play-centered education. Therefore, it was concluded in the study that the renewed preschool education program supports the individual in terms of daily life skills, individual skills, and values education.

Recommendations

Based on the evaluation of preschool teachers' views regarding the renewed preschool education program within the framework of the 21st Century Maarif Model, assessed through Eisner's Educational Criticism Evaluation Model, the recommendations of the study are as follows:

In order for preschool teachers to implement the renewed preschool education program more effectively, implementation guidebooks adapted to the preschool curriculum and supported with concrete examples should be developed and distributed to teachers.

In-service training programs should be expanded and made continuous so that preschool teachers can be more effective in imparting 21st-century skills.

To ensure that preschool classroom environments meet the requirements of the curriculum, physical and digital infrastructure support should be provided for classrooms. Game-supported programs for teachers and students should be developed and distributed to schools.

Awareness-raising activities should be carried out to enhance effective school-family cooperation, and activities should be organized for parents regarding the objectives of the curriculum and its contributions to children.

While planning comprehensive revisions in education, such as the renewed preschool education program, teachers working in the field should be actively involved in the process. At the very least, teachers' opinions should be taken into account and considered in renewed curricula.

In order for teachers to develop a meaningful perspective on curricula, in-service trainings, workshops, and continuous guidance services should be provided to teachers.

During the implementation process, teachers' feedback should be collected regularly, importance should be given to improving the model in line with the problems encountered, and a dynamic and updatable approach directly nourished by teachers' experiences should be adopted.

The theoretical foundations of the curriculum should be related to the developmental characteristics of early childhood and conveyed to teachers in a comprehensible manner.

An interdisciplinary approach should be adopted in the preschool curriculum, and the program should be supported with a holistic approach including values education, play-based learning, and social-emotional development.

Maximum alignment between theoretical and practical applications should be ensured in classroom practices of preschool education programs. In this way, the multidimensional development of the individual should be supported.

Conflict of Interest

Each of the investigators has no conflicts of interest.

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Ethical Statement

This investigation was examined at the meeting of the Hatay Mustafa Kemal University Ethics Committee dated 03.07.2025, numbered 09, and found ethically appropriate with the decision numbered 2025-2026.

Credit Author Statement

Each author made an equal contribution to the study.

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