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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TURKISH PRESCHOOL TEACHERS DURING SUMMER HOLIDAYS

Research article

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the professional development of preschool teachers during summer holidays, and to develop recommendations for professional development between teaching semesters. The study is built on the basic interpretive design, with a study group of 24 preschool teachers. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and were analyzed through content analysis. The content analysis revealed that summer holidays are basically seen as getting away from the profession and relaxation for preschool teachers, not as an opportunity for professional development. Preschool teachers found summer holidays unproductive in terms of their professional development. While the preschool teachers think that professional development activities should exist during the summer holidays, they believe that the current professional development system in Turkey does not make the idea very attractive and is considered to be inefficient. The preschool teachers recommended that all professional development activities should fit with the needs of teachers, that both their personal and professional development should be supported, that holistic content should be created, that instructors specialized should be recruited, that learning methods fostering active participation and alternative assessment methods should be preferred, and that the expertise gained through professional development should be recognized, and rewarded.

Keywords: professional development, inservice training, preschool teachers, summer holidays

1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental public service. It is the basic responsibility of education systems to provide quality education for all individuals, regardless of their sociocultural characteristics (Vaillant & Manso, 2013). A quality education is the key that opens the door to academic success (Barber & Mourshed, 2007), social development and learning (Little, Goe, & Bell, 2009), as well as the potential for what is deemed a “good life” (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2014). Quality education is a multidimensional phenomenon that can be affected by many different variables (Kane & Cantrell, 2010). Teacher quality is the school-related variable having the greatest effect on student success (Hanushek, 2011; Hattie, 2009; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2011). In their study of successful education systems, Barber and Mourshed (2007) concluded that “the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (p. 16). Schleicher (2020), the OECD’s education director, stated that “the quality of teachers and teaching can never exceed the support, work organization and incentive structures operating within an education system” (p. 5). In order to deliver a quality education, every teacher should be provided an appropriate initial teacher education that includes content and pedagogical

content knowledge as well as general culture, they should be able to renew and update their knowledge and skills over time, and do their job (as teachers) without losing their motivation to learn and to teach (Özcan, 2011).

The results of empirical research has revealed the critical role of teacher quality in terms of student success (e.g., Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, & Staiger, 2008), and has drawn attention to the professional development of teachers (Kuijpers, Houtveen, & Wubbels, 2010). As such, teachers' professional development has taken center stage of reforms in education (European Commission, 2010; OECD, 2005). The quality of a teacher largely depends on the professional development they receive, including their preservice training. The underlying concept is that teachers' professional development improves their teaching, and in turn enhances their own students' learning and academic success (Desimone, 2009). Providing teachers with quality professional development opportunities both before and during their service is one of the main strategies for achieving the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development goals (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2016) and the European Union's 2021-2030 European Education Area goals (Council of the European Union, 2021). Similarly, teacher quality is the primary component of Turkey's 2023 Education Vision (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB / Turkish Ministry of National Education], 2018).

The significant changes seen in the field of education have not only broadened the general responsibilities of teachers (OECD, 2005), but have also increased the expectations from teachers (Bubb, 2004), which in turn has increased the demand for continuous learning and the professional development of teachers (Hill, 2009). From this perspective, teachers are seen as lifelong learners (OECD, 2019), with the profession being a long and arduous process of acquiring complex knowledge and expert skills, and being able to continuously develop their knowledge and skills in the face of increasingly diverse demands (Ingersoll & Collins, 2018). According to Fullan and Steigelbauer (1991), the professional development of teachers is the sum of formal and informal learning accomplished by an individual starting with their preservice education through until their retirement from teaching. A teacher's professional development is a process that starts during their initial teacher education programs, and which then continues throughout their professional life with activities organized specifically to enhance their teaching abilities (Day & Sachs, 2004). The "Teaching and Learning International Survey" (TALIS) defines professional development as: "...activities that develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher" (OECD, 2009, p. 49). The European Commission (2000) defined professional development as a process that begins with admission to initial training programs and consists of interrelated components of initial training, induction, inservice training, and advanced training. According to Odabaşı (2008), professional development is a combination of all activities that serve the purpose of updating teachers' instructional, managerial, and personal knowledge, as well as their skills and attitudes. Sancar, Atal, and Deryakulu (2021), who approached professional development more holistically based on a wide and deep review of the published literature, stated that professional development, which starts in teacher education institutions and continues throughout the teaching career, affects students' academic success as they are in turn affected by the characteristics of their teacher, what their teacher teaches, and how they go about teaching. Teachers' professional development consists of interrelated dimensions such as reforms, programs, school climate, supportive activities, and cooperation.

Quality professional development activities not only support teachers in their teaching practices (Desimone, 2009), it also helps with their adaptation to the profession and the education system (Vonk, 1991), their personal development (Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009),

and helps to increase their job satisfaction and self-efficacy (OECD, 2019). Participation in professional development activities also contributes to the professionalization of the teaching profession (Guerriero, 2017), and thereby to the success of attempts to introduce educational reforms (Villegas - Reimers, 2003).

Teachers' professional development is seen as a lifelong learning process that includes preservice, induction, and inservice training (Schleicher, 2018). In Turkey, since 1982 teachers' professional development has been supported with initial teacher education programs at the bachelor degree level at universities (Yükseköğretim Kurulu [YÖK / Turkish Higher Education Council], 2007b) and also after entering the profession, with induction programs, inservice training, and postgraduate education programs.

Since 1982, preservice teacher education programs in Turkey have mostly been conducted within education or educational sciences faculties in universities (YÖK, 2007). Attempts to improve the quality of teachers have been ongoing with reforms introduced in 1997, 2006, 2009, 2014, 2017, and 2018 (Ulubey & Tican-Başaran, 2019). In 2020, the Turkish Higher Education Council transferred the authority to develop teacher education programs to the referred institutions, heralding a new era in teacher education in Turkey (YÖK, 2020).

Another phase of professional development for teachers includes help to ensure their adaptation when first joining the profession. Since 1943, induction programs have been systematically implemented in Turkey by the Ministry of National Education (MEB, 2006). Following this period of induction, inservice training has been used to keep teachers up-to-date with the changing needs of the profession. Countries aware of the critical role of teachers in society give the necessary importance to inservice training for teachers' professional development (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Universities, regional education authorities, and also schools take an active role in the programs organized throughout the school year (European Commission, 2008). In about a quarter of OECD member countries, teachers' participation in professional development activities is deemed mandatory for their career development and recertification (OECD, 2005).

In Turkey, inservice training for teachers is provided at either the local or central level. The inservice training of teachers can be in the form of training organized at the national level by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE) through various institutions and organizations, as well as in the form of Professional Development Activities, known as "Seminar Studies," organized by the MoNE. These Professional Development Activities take place at four points in the calendar; from the end of the spring/summer semester classes to July 1 and from September 1 to the start of the fall/winter semester (depending on the academic calendar), and takes around 10 days (MEB, 2006). In addition, as of 2019, training can also take place during the 1 week mid-semester breaks (i.e., middle of each semester) (MEB, 2019a).

It is possible to summarize inservice training programs as being the main means of teachers' professional development in Turkey under four headings (Eğitim Reformu Girişimi [ERG / Turkish Education Reform Initiative], 2015):

1. Courses and seminars organized by the General Directorate of Teacher Training and Development (MoNE) in various centers (i.e., centrally directed professional development programs).
2. Courses and seminars organized locally by provincial and district National Education Directorates (MoNE) (i.e., locally directed professional development programs).

3. Educational activities organized by schools (i.e., school directed professional development programs).
4. Activities such as conferences, panels, workshops, and postgraduate education programs which teachers attend individually.

Centrally directed professional development activities, which were mainly conducted face-to-face, have been conducted through distance education means during the COVID-19 pandemic (MEB, 2021), and as part of this process, the teachers have also gained different professional development experiences than they would otherwise have been used to (Tekin, 2020).

Studies have shown that professional development opportunities have not been offered to all teachers at the same rate in Turkey (Güneş, 2016). The current inservice professional development activities are considered insufficient to meet the increased and broadened societal demands from its teachers (Kaya, 2020; OECD, 2009). According to the TALIS 2018 results, secondary school teachers in Turkey believe that inservice training does not positively affect their professional development (OECD, 2019). The teachers mentioned barriers to their professional development as a lack of incentives to attend professional development activities, their working hours overlapping with the time allocated to professional development activities, insufficient employer support, and a lack of professional development activities that actually meet their needs (OECD, 2019). In a nationwide study conducted by the R&D unit of the MoNE, Yayla and Sayın (2006) revealed that the participation of teachers to inservice professional development activities is not encouraged in Turkey. The current inservice training offered does not adequately meet the teachers' professional development needs as their needs are not taken into account. Traditional teaching methods such as lecturing are preferred, and the training is neither developed in a data-driven manner nor adequately evaluated. Related to the centrally directed inservice training in Turkey, Önen, Mertoğlu, Saka, and Gürdal (2009) stated that, the participation rate of teachers was low, and that the primary aim was simple information transfer largely carried out through lectures. Although the titles and contents of training may change, the professional development activities present certain shortcomings in terms of actually enabling teachers to gain new knowledge and skills, to become excited about education and, due in part to the traditional teaching methods, to reflect what they learn to their students (Kesen & Öztürk, 2019).

Inservice professional development activities for teachers are mainly planned to be conducted during school time. However, the "summer holidays," with minimal workloads for serving teachers, are considered to present a good opportunity for their professional development. During the summer holidays, teachers can find professional development opportunities both within and outside of the country to suit their needs (Patterson, 2014). In Turkey, since 1961, the period between July 1 and September 1 has been legally accepted as the summer holiday period for teachers (MEB, 2006). Today, the world is changing fast and knowledge is becoming more important for economies to achieve that all-important competitive advantage; as such, how summer holidays are spent by teachers has become an important issue for their professional development, and accordingly for the development of the country.

Due to the rapid developments during early childhood, and the contributions of a child's experiences during this period to their future life, the quality of today's preschool teachers is considered to be of paramount importance. Decades of studies have shown that the learning and development of a child are closely related to the quality of their teachers (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2019), and that the quality of preschool

teachers relates back to their professional development (OECD, 2006). In this regard, the purpose of the current study is to investigate the professional development of preschool teachers during the summer holiday period, and to develop recommendations for more productive professional development. To this end, answers to the following research questions are sought:

1. What is the meaning attached to the term “summer holiday” for preschool teachers?
2. What are the opinions of preschool teachers regarding participating in professional development activities during their summer holidays?
3. What are the perceptions of preschool teachers about their current professional development during the summer holidays?
4. What obstacles prevent preschool teachers from participating in professional development activities organized during the summer holidays?
5. What are the expectations and recommendations of preschool teachers about spending their summer holidays more effectively in terms of their professional development?

2. Method

The current study was conducted according to the basic interpretive design, one of the established qualitative research methods (Merriam, 2013). As such, the aim was to conduct an in-depth examination of preschool teachers’ professional development during their summer holidays (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002). Within this context, preschool teachers’ perceptions based on their experiences of professional development during summer holidays, the meanings they ascribed to the concept, and the current state of their professional development during summer holidays are described in detail. Additionally, the preschool teachers’ recommendations about policies and practices regarding their professional development during summer holidays are provided (Lester, 1999).

2.1. Study Group

The study group is comprised of 24 preschool teachers working at state schools in 14 different provinces of Turkey. In the construction of the study group, criterion sampling (Creswell, 2003), maximum variation, and convenience sampling (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016) were taken into consideration. While three preschool teachers with longer teaching experience were met by the first author during their teaching practicum, the remaining 21 preschool teachers were all former students of the first author during their initial teacher education. In selecting the preschool teachers to be included, special care was taken to ensure they had spent at least one summer holiday in the profession, were voluntarily participating in the study, from various different provinces across Turkey, from different types of residential area, and had completed a varying number of years in teaching. Demographics of the study group are presented in Table 1. Data saturation was taken as the basis when deciding the size of the study group.

Table 1. *Demographics of the study group*

No	Gender	Education	Province	Service (years)	Contract	Location	Work/ live same area	Position
P1	Female	Bachelor’s	Bitlis	4	Tenured	Village	No	Teacher
P2	Female	Master’s	Muğla	6	Tenured	Village	No	Teacher
P3	Male	Bachelor’s	Hatay	8	Tenured	Village	Yes	Admin.
P4	Female	Bachelor’s	Antalya	8	Tenured	Town	No	Teacher
P5	Male	Bachelor’s	Muş	6	Tenured	Village	Yes	Teacher
P6	Female	Bachelor’s	Muğla	31	Tenured	Village	Yes	Teacher

No	Gender	Education	Province	Service (years)	Contract	Location	Work/ live same area	Position
P7	Female	Bachelor's	Muğla	36	Tenured	City	Yes	Teacher
P8	Female	Master's	Van	7	Tenured	Village	Yes	Teacher
P9	Female	Bachelor's	Gaziantep	1	Contracted	City	No	Teacher
P10	Male	Bachelor's	Hakkâri	3	Contracted	Village	No	Teacher
P11	Male	Bachelor's	Batman	3	Contracted	Town	No	Teacher
P12	Female	Bachelor's	Muğla	8	Tenured	Village	Yes	Teacher
P13	Female	Bachelor's	Ankara	6	Tenured	City	No	Teacher
P14	Female	Bachelor's	Rize	7	Tenured	Town	No	Teacher
P15	Female	Bachelor's	Muğla	5	Tenured	Town	No	Teacher
P16	Female	Bachelor's	Muğla	24	Tenured	Town	No	Teacher
P17	Female	Master's	Muğla	13	Tenured	Town	No	Teacher
P18	Male	Bachelor's	Muğla	5	Tenured	Village	No	Admin.
P19	Male	Bachelor's	Şanlıurfa	5	Tenured	Town	Yes	Admin.
P20	Female	Bachelor's	Muğla	19	Tenured	Village	No	Teacher
P21	Male	Bachelor's	Elazığ	7	Tenured	Village	Yes	Teacher
P22	Male	Bachelor's	Diyarbakır	6	Tenured	City	No	Admin.
P23	Female	Bachelor's	Diyarbakır	5	Tenured	Village	No	Teacher
P24	Female	Bachelor's	Diyarbakır	4	Tenured	Village	No	Teacher

2.2. Data Collection

In order to obtain rich data in the study, the semi-structured interview method (Merriam, 2013; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016) was preferred as the data collection method and a semi-structured interview form as the data collection instrument. The interviews aimed to help understand preschool teachers' the meaning ascribed to, their experiences and recommendations about the professional development during the summer holidays (Patton, 2002A draft interview form was updated according to the opinion of two experts from the fields of qualitative research methods and teacher training, and a final form was realized after piloting with two preschool teachers outside of the study group. Example questions from the interview form are: What does summer holiday mean to you as a teacher?, What do you do in your summer holiday for your professional development?, What are the obstacles to professional development during the summer holidays?, and What can be done to foster the professional development of preschool teachers during summer holidays?

The data collection process was initiated following ethics approval (No. 51, dated February 3, 2021) obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of the university where the first author is employed. The study's data were collected during the 2020-2021 academic year through individual interviews, which were each held through video conferencing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the interviews, information was provided about the study, and then the interview questions were addressed to the volunteer participants. The interviews were audio recorded, with each lasting 30-35 minutes on average. Each audio recording was assigned a code (i.e., P1, P2,...P24) and the files stored within a password-protected folder on a computer. The audio recordings were then transcribed and uploaded to the qualitative data software.

2.3. Data Analysis

Content analysis was conducted to analyze the collected data (Creswell, 2003). In the first stage, invivo and open coding were performed using NVivo 11, followed by axis coding in the second stage (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018). Thus, first the codes were determined, and then

similar and related codes were grouped according to themes in order to make the overall data more understandable (Kvale, 1996). To aid understanding, the findings were then visualized using Draw.io (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Considering the research questions, relationships between the codes within each theme were explained and, where appropriate, with codes from other themes. Through supporting the explanations with direct quotations from the interviewees (specified as P1, P2,...P24), it was aimed to ensure internal consistency of the analyzed data.

Lincoln and Guba (1985), present four types of criteria for trustworthiness, which means convincing the audience that the findings of a qualitative study are “worth paying attention to” (p. 290). In this context, for the purposes of establishing credibility, prolonged interviews that allowed for additional questions to be asked were conducted by selecting interviewees familiar with the researcher in order that the potential for negatives arising from time pressures and researcher-participant unfamiliarity were avoided. In addition, by including preschool teachers with different demographics in the study group, credibility and transferability were strengthened. It was investigated whether the findings were based accurately on the research data through expert review, with approval from a school administrator who offered rich data, and a preschool teacher who had completed their Master’s studies. For transferability, all stages of the study, especially the role of the study group and researchers, were explained in detail. For dependability and confirmability, the opinions and suggestions of two researchers experienced in qualitative research and academic writing were taken at various stages of the study.

3. Findings

A deductive approach has been adopted in the presentation of the findings. The main themes are each explained along with their sub-themes and concepts that constituted them, plus evidence presented through direct quotations. The main findings that emerged from the analyses are presented in Figure 1.

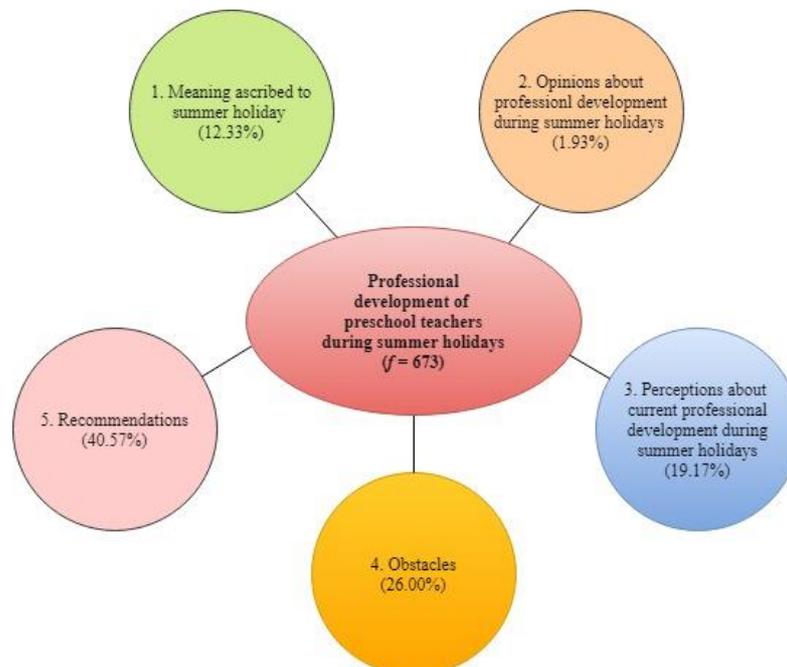


Figure 1. Main themes from preschool teachers’ views about professional development during summer holidays

The analysis of the preschool teachers' views about professional development during summer holidays yielded the five main themes seen in Figure 1. As follows, each main theme is presented separately.

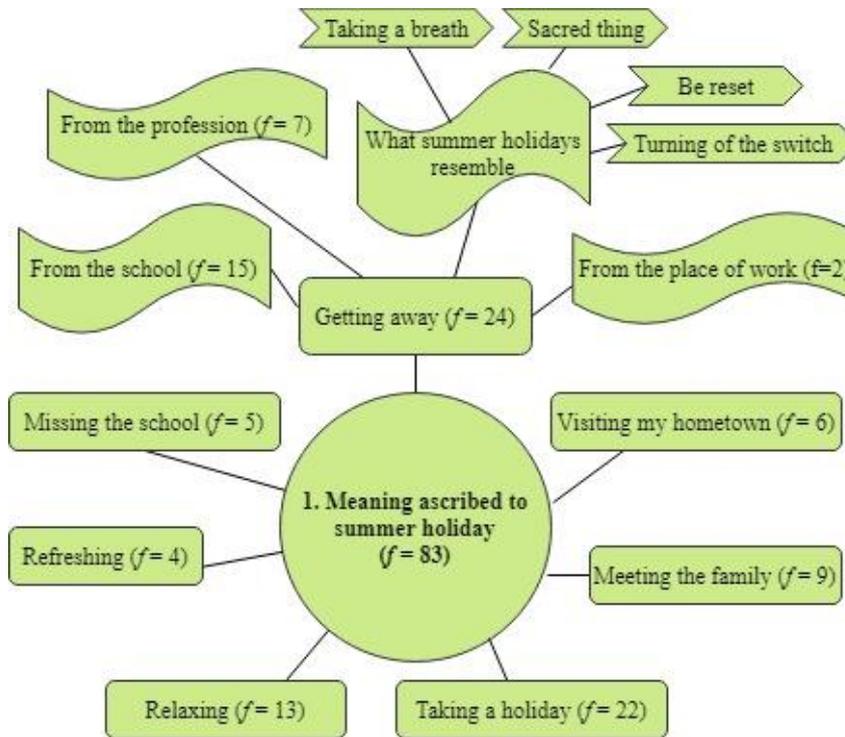


Figure 2. Meanings ascribed to summer holiday by preschool teachers

In Figure 2, the opinions of the preschool teachers about the meanings they ascribed to “summer holiday” are gathered under seven themes, and mostly under the themes of “getting away” and “taking a holiday.” Stating that they work hard throughout an exhausting long period of 9-10 months when the schools are open, the preschool teachers remarked that they see their summer holidays as an opportunity to get away from the school, the school environment, their profession, and from their place of work; therefore, they do not want to participate in any professional development initiative. The preschool teachers believe that this relates to the developmental characteristics of the students they teach. The preschool teachers stated that working with younger students can be tiring, and that working with a new student group with different interests and needs every year increases their workload, which can lead to burnout. For this reason, they stated seeing summer holidays as a time to take a breath, to reset, turn off the switch, and in this sense their summer holidays are seen as a sacred time that they eagerly await throughout the school year. P19, who is also a school principle, summarized the general picture with some added clarity:

P19. Due to the pressures of their work, teachers treat their summer holiday as if they are escaping, that they need to get away from the profession for 2 months; however, this distancing can cause professional alienation that is difficult to restore. To be realistic, summer holiday is a ‘sacred thing’ for teachers, something that should never be touched, at least not interfered with.

P2. After having worked for 9-10 months, it is something like rest time, time to get completely away from everything. It is a period to forget the school time.

P13. It is seen as a time for personal refreshment. I wish it was seen as professional refreshment, but I think of it more as a psychological/mental reset.

P19. Obviously it is an opportunity to travel or relax. We are free of school. In other words, it is not usually seen as a break to be utilized for personal or professional development.

P4. Summer holidays mean a period of professional alienation. When we go back to school, we are already somewhat alienated and it can be difficult to recover afterwards.

For the preschool teachers, summer holiday also means taking a holiday, relaxing and in this sense, going to their hometown and meeting up with family there, especially for younger teachers who work away from their families. Some teachers, on the other hand, stated that the 2-month summer holiday was a long period, and that they would get bored towards the end and that they missed the school environment, whilst others stated that summer holidays meant getting ready for the new school year and to refresh themselves.



Figure 3. Preschool teachers' opinions about professional development during summer holidays

Figure 3 shows that a significant number of the participant preschool teachers think that there should be professional development activities during the school summer holidays. While a large proportion stated that professional development activities would be beneficial for their self-development, and should therefore participate in such activities, some teachers stated believing in the importance of professional development, but that the existing professional development activities were inefficient and should be rearranged in such a way that would increase their teaching performance.

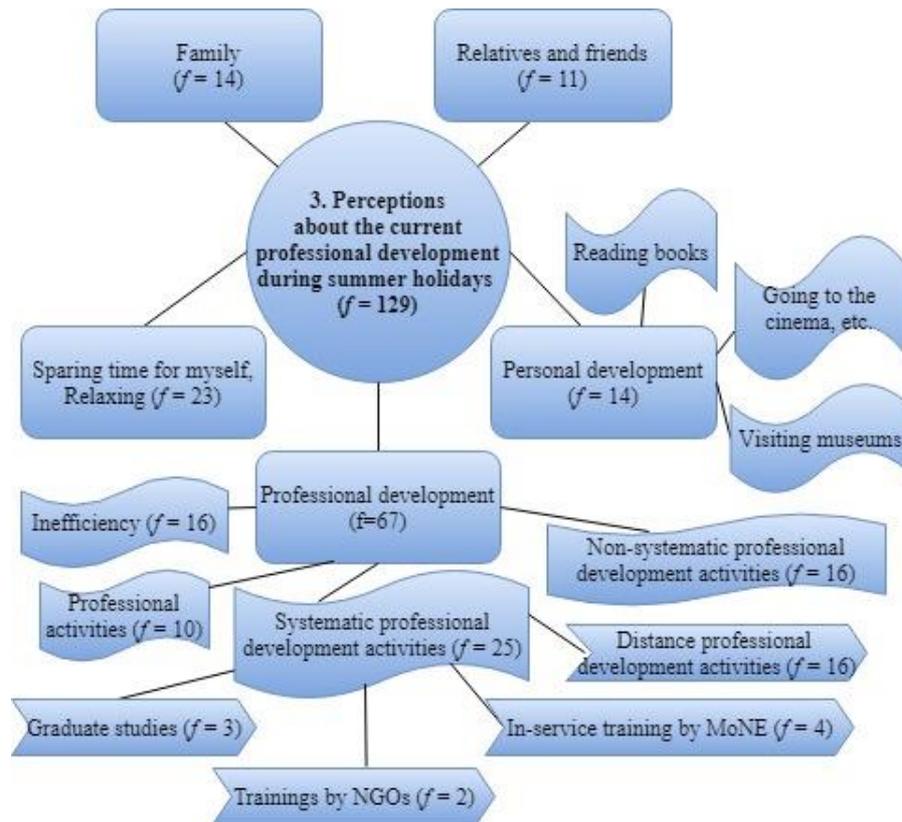


Figure 4. Preschool teachers' perceptions about current professional development during summer holidays

The perceptions of the participant preschool teachers about how their summer holidays are spent are gathered under five themes (see Figure 4). While a significant proportion, especially those working away from their families, stated taking time for themselves during the summer holidays, relaxing and spending time with their families, relatives, and friends. Some mentioned undertaking activities for their own personal development such as reading books, going to the cinema, and visiting museums, etc., and that their personal development contributed to their professional development. When asked about their professional development during the summer holidays, a significant proportion of the preschool teachers stated the summertime was very inefficient in terms of professional development. Some stated having never participated in professional development activities during the summer, whilst others who had participated preferred to participate during the school year. While some preschool teachers stated having mostly participated in non-systematic professional development activities such as reviewing what they had done during the school year, improving themselves on issues in which they were lacking and exchanging opinions with their colleagues, others stated having participated in systematic professional development activities. Some of these preschool teachers had been more involved in distance professional development activities offered through eTwinning or other platforms, and especially from the Education Information Network (EBA) of the Turkish Ministry of National Education, whilst others had participated in professional development actions organized by the MoNE or NGOs. However, one preschool teacher (P2), undertaking graduate academic studies, mentioned that summers presented a great opportunity for academic development.

P3. It is obvious and clear that we usually spend our summer holidays doing nothing professionally.

P12. You know, at the end of June, we submit all the documents, ... we close the curtains of teaching up until schools reopen on September 1.

P17. I prefer participating in professional development activities during the school year.

P19. It's very spontaneous actually, because there is no systematic approach... we just do things arbitrarily.

P14. In general, every year if I see myself as lacking in something, I buy books to compensate for my shortcomings... I read journals and books to follow the developments in the literature.

P11. Towards the time when the schools reopen, we try to organize annual plans, events, and search for new plans, but it cannot be said that I have made an effort to improve myself during the summer holidays.

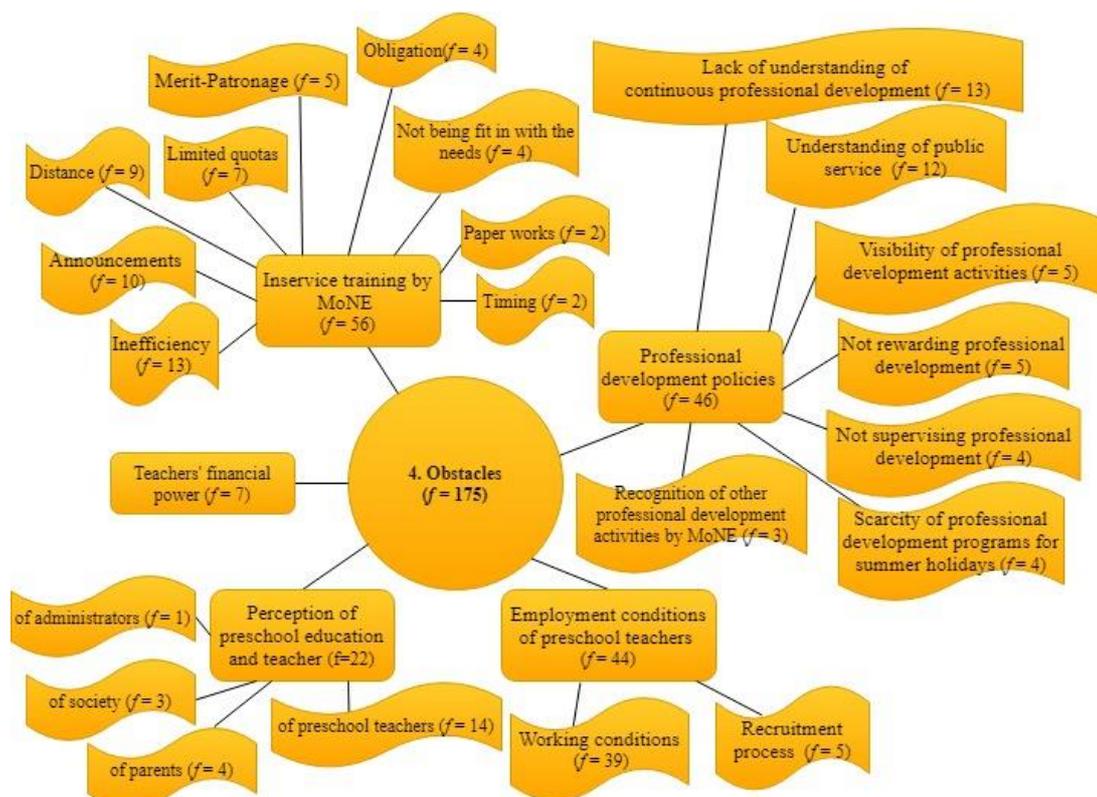


Figure 5. Obstacles to preschool teachers' participation in professional development activities during summer holidays

As can be seen in Figure 5, the preschool teachers' opinions on the obstacles to participating in professional development activities during the summer holidays are mostly concentrated on the themes of inservice training provided by the MoNE and its professional development policies. There are also some obstacles under the themes of preschool teachers' employment conditions, their financial situation, and their perspective concerning preschool teaching. The preschool teachers think that their experiences of inefficient inservice training organized by the MoNE, encountering content similar to what they had already learned during their initial teacher education, the use of traditional teaching and learning methods that do not support active participation, and non-specialized instructors as being the main obstacles to their participation in professional development activities. These obstacles are accompanied by the problems related to the announcements of professional development activities in schools.

P18. The professional development activities organized by the Ministry seem to be carried out just for the sake of doing something.

P21. They have one slide to show; writing, writing, writing... Nobody knows what is being said on the board,... their only concern is to be seen to be doing something.

P20. You attend inservice training, but they don't tell you something you don't know.... I have taken many courses and none seem to differ in their content.

P9. Go, sit down, let the instructor tell us something and then give us a written exam. If we get enough points, we get the certificate, we leave. I don't want such a thing.

P14. ...when the trainer arrives unprepared; frankly, I have experienced this many times in the training I have attended, and we say, Oh, it's waste of time again.

P10. We are not even informed about some of the training. I don't know if it is our fault or if what needs to be announced never happens, but I have missed many.

In addition, according to the preschool teachers, other obstacles also exist to their participation to inservice training, including problems related to the timing of the training, training held in remote cities, limited quotas for the numbers of participant teachers, selection of participants not on the basis of merit, and not being accepted to a training course despite having applied many times as mostly favored teachers are accepted. While excessive paperwork involved in applying for training is a deterrent, previous experiences of inefficient compulsory training events has also caused preschool teachers to choose not to attend the professional development activities on offer.

P7. Training takes place in remote places... so, cost is the first problem, and the second is where we will leave our children.

P17. I applied until 2 or 3 years ago, but there were 4,000 or 5,000 applications; and let's say a total of 40 teachers are accepted, so you need a good bit of luck.

P21. They ask for too many documents during the registration for professional development activities that it's really discouraging.

P19. In general, acceptance to quality training depends on how strong the connections are with your superiors.

Under the theme of professional development policies, which was shown as the second major theme, the preschool teachers mentioned a lack of understanding when it comes to professional development-based public service in Turkey. Accordingly, in educational circles and among teachers, professional development is not seen as being encouraged or supervised, and obstacles to participation include the absence of professional development programs specifically developed for the summer break, that teachers are not well informed about the existence of such training programs, that attending professional development initiatives is not rewarded, and that the MoNE does not recognize professional development activities organized by other institutions and organizations. K19, who is also a school principle, summarized this situation in some detail as follows:

P19. If we criticize from within... teachers may feel that 'I was appointed, I kind of hooked up, I get my salary, you know that classic cliché; I'm already getting my salary, I'm a civil servant and no one interferes, why should I do more?' They act like it's the greatest thing in life, that they don't need to do anything more, and then they start complaining about the school, the environment, their students, the parents, and finally about the school system... This provides ground for teachers to escape in every sense... so it's an effort to put the blame on someone or something else.

P21. There are no activities for teachers to improve themselves during the summer holidays.

P19. There are many activities at the moment, but there is no center where I can go and have a look when I want to... This is especially true for teachers working in rural areas.

P18. Courses are taken just for the sake of taking them, but have no return or tangible value. They are just seen as a waste of time.

The third theme of the findings regarding the obstacles to professional development of preschool teachers was their employment conditions. The preschool teachers reported that the working conditions during and after their recruitment negatively affected their professional development. The younger preschool teachers stated that the process of being appointed as a contracted teacher was a tiring process, which caused the appointment to be seen as the final professional goal. Then, experiencing difficulties in gaining permission and having to work away from their family throughout the school year resulted in their not seeing their professional development as a priority. Preschool teachers from disadvantaged areas stated experiencing difficulties in hearing about professional development activities and as such expectations from them were low. This all stops professional development from becoming a priority for teachers. As preschool teachers, they have to work with a beginner student group each year, which they said increased their workload that they had to spare additional time for the required paperwork and especially for the students' parents, which also increased their workload outside of the classroom. They preschool teachers often work in a noisy environment and have to work hard all the time, and stated that, after some time, these working conditions can turn their profession into a stressful one, which can lead to tiredness and ultimately to professional burnout. Therefore, seen from this perspective, the findings become more meaningful; as depicted in Figure 2, the summer holidays means "getting away" from school and from the teaching profession, whilst in Figure 4 it shows that summer holidays are inefficient in terms of professional development, and Figure 5 mentions a general inadequacy of professional development policies. Working conditions specific to preschool teaching can lead to preschool teachers not prioritizing their own professional development during the summer holidays.

P2. I have a salary now, I have dreamed of a job with a job guarantee for years, I went through a very difficult process like KPSS [Selection Examination for Professional Posts in Turkish Public Organizations], and so now I deserve the award. I also have a salary, so from now on no-one will force me to do anything, this is my way of thinking.

P9. As preschool teachers, our students change every year, class sizes change, student potentials change, everything is repeated all over again, year upon year.

P21. We are really getting tired. We don't just try to educate the children, but also their parents. The parents can make us really tired, the MoNE makes us tired as their paperwork processes can really overwhelm us, ... all of these exhaust us.

P18. Unlike many other professionals, teachers cannot take vacation during the teaching semester. For this reason, they want to get away as much as possible and rest during the summer.

According to the preschool teachers, another obstacle to their professional development relates to perceptions held regarding preschool teachers. In this regard, they consider that their own, their school administrators', students' parents', and society's perceptions in general of their profession have a negative effect on their professional development. They mentioned that some of their colleagues only saw teaching as a means of getting by, and that

just being appointed to a teaching post was their only professional goal; as such, some teachers have no professional development or employment expectations beyond being appointed. In addition, the preschool teachers also remarked that some school administrators do not look positively at their requests for professional development. Also, they mentioned that the parents and society in general often just see them as caregivers who take care of the younger children, and as a result their contributions are not appreciated in terms of the children's development. Each of these various reasons negatively affect their enthusiasm as preschool teachers to seek out professional development. Another obstacle to their professional development is that their financial situation, as teachers, is generally insufficient to support their participation in long-term activities located in other provinces.

P3. Parents see preschool teachers as a means of getting rid of their children for a while and do not attach much importance to the education being provided. This creates the feeling in teachers that we are caregivers, not teachers, and so we look forward to the summer holidays and just relax during this period.

P17. First you have to convince the school principle and then parents of students in your class in order to participate in a training program organized in another city and moreover, you may need to make family arrangements in order to attend the any training. We cannot just leave the classroom as there is no-one to take our place,... we do not have free days. Whilst I may want to attend inservice training, it is very difficult in these conditions.

P22. Most of the teachers pass the KPSS exams and are then appointed to a teaching post. Unfortunately, they often say, 'Now I have a job and so I don't need to do anything more.'

P5. As a man, if you say 'I am a preschool teacher,' then they think 'You are doing nothing, you are just sitting around all day'... while we may strive to do something academic, we are still trying to be accepted in society.

P3. For a teacher to improve themselves, first they need to be in a financially good position.

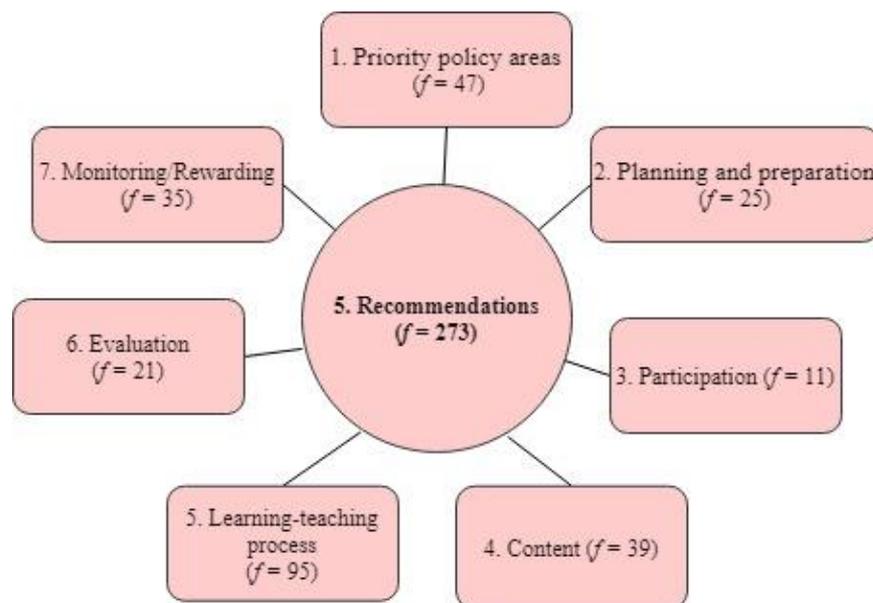


Figure 6. Preschool teachers' recommendations for increased participation in professional development activities during summer holidays

In Figure 6, it can be seen that the recommendations of the preschool teachers to increase professional development activity participation during the summer holidays ($f = 273$) are grouped into seven main themes covering the various stages of the professional development process, from policy development to rewarding participation. In the following section, each theme is separately examined in detail.

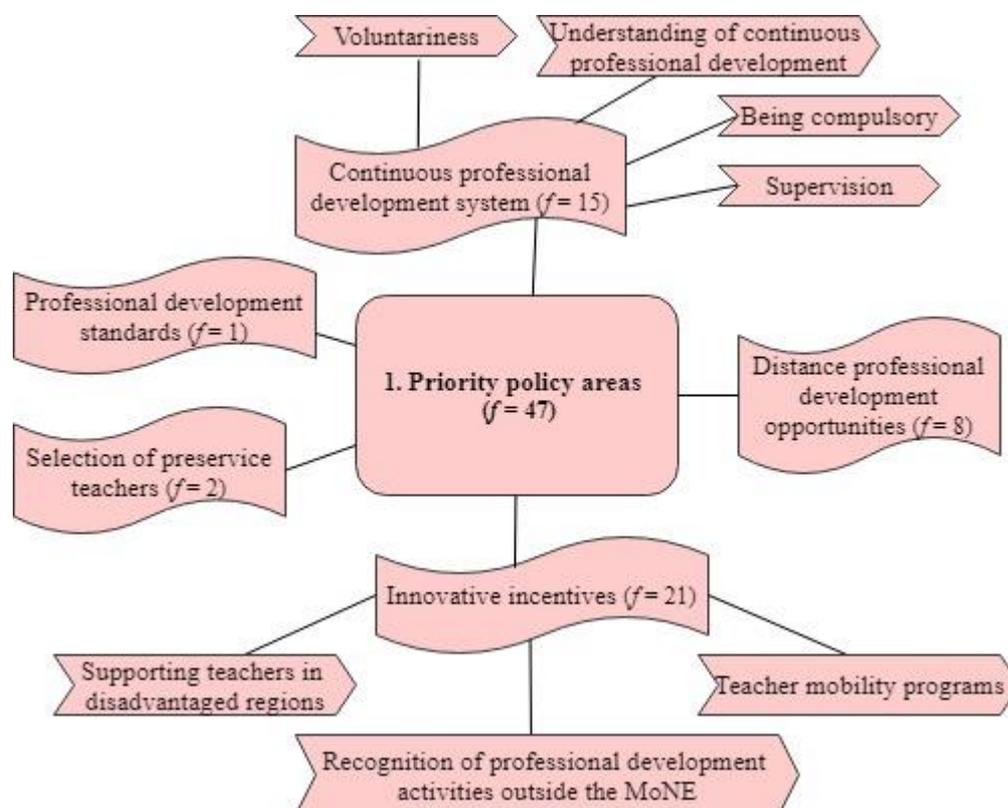


Figure 7. Preschool teachers' recommendations for priority policy areas to increase their professional development during summer holidays

One of the main themes among the recommendations put forward was priority policy areas. As seen in Figure 7, the preschool teachers believe that it is necessary to start by selecting the most suitable preservice teachers to join the profession, combined with the development of viable policies to determine standards for teachers' professional development. The preschool teachers recommended the establishment of a continuous professional development system where teachers adopt the understanding of continuous professional development, where a certain level of professional development is compulsory and supervised, but where the selection of each activity remains on a volunteer basis. Considering the findings portrayed in Figure 5, the lack of a continuous professional development understanding among teachers is one of the obstacles to professional development, these recommendations for prioritizing continuous professional development are quite meaningful. Suggestions included that existing policies for distance professional development opportunities be strengthened in terms of sustainable professional development, that innovative incentive policies such as prioritizing teachers from disadvantaged areas should be developed, that professional development activities outside of those administered by the MoNE should receive formal MoNE recognition, and teacher mobility programs should be established.

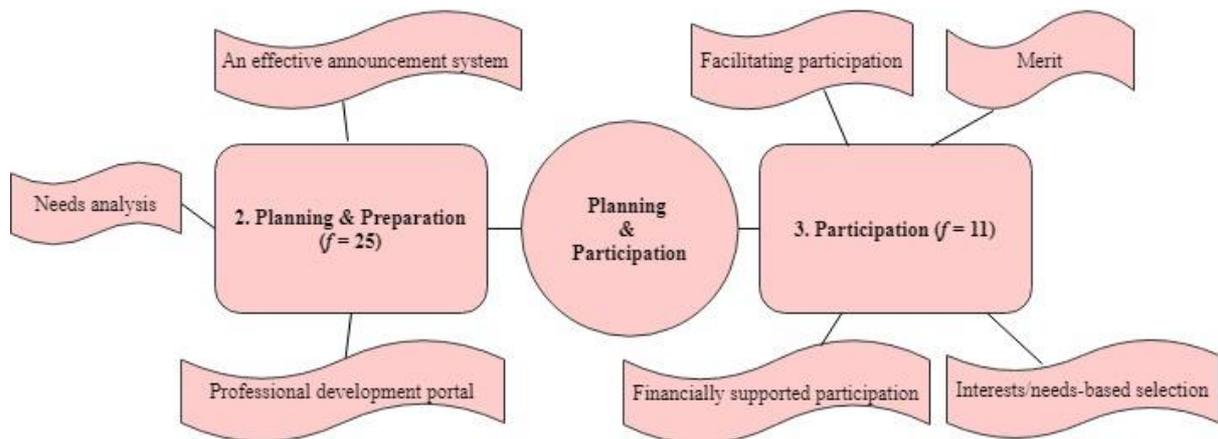


Figure 8. Preschool teachers' recommendations for planning and participation in professional development activities during summer holidays

In Figure 8, it can be seen that the preschool teachers suggested that a robust needs analysis should be undertaken during the planning and preparation phase of any professional development activity. Those activities created based on teachers' actual needs should be announced via some effective announcement system, and advertised on a professional development portal in order to ensure their visibility and access by eligible teachers at any point in time. So as to ensure the participation of teachers, it was recommended first to facilitate participation, to accept the most suitable teachers for training (i.e., merit-based), to grant teachers the freedom to choose professional development activities according to their own interests and needs, and to provide financial support for teachers to be able to participate in professional development activities. These recommendations appear to correspond to the obstacles to teachers' participation mentioned in Figure 5.

P20. For example, I would be interested in a portal where all the available training was listed. I could go there, click on the preschool branch, and see all the courses I could take in that field right in front of me. It may ask, 'Which do you prefer?' and 'Choose at least two courses,' I could then select two and that would be that. I think it should be that simple and accessible.

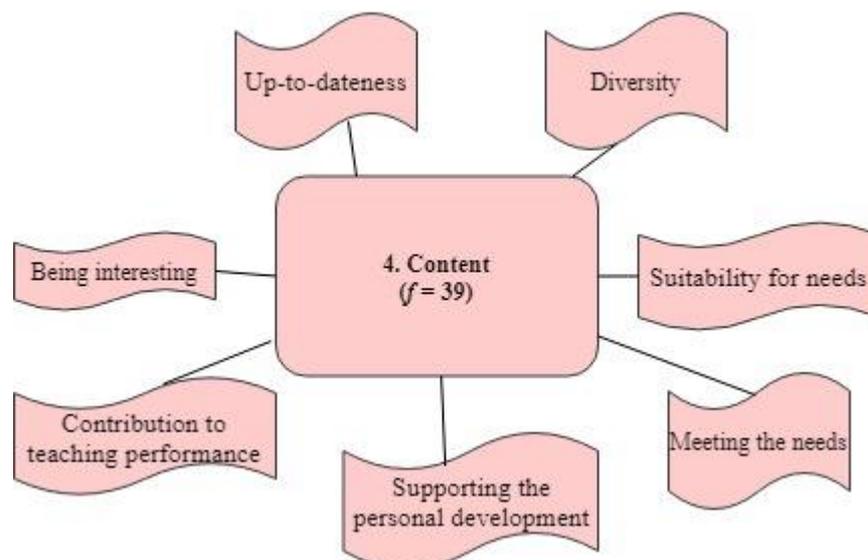


Figure 9. Preschool teachers' recommendations for content of professional development activities during summer holidays

In the content theme illustrated in Figure 9, the preschool teachers mentioned that the content of professional development activities should be appropriate, interesting, up-to-date, diverse, and innovative, while also contributing to the teachers' in-class performance and supporting their personal development.

P5. It shouldn't be like going somewhere and just getting our heads filled with something, and then us telling the same in our classes. Educational and cultural activities should be integrated like a bird flying with both wings.

P2. It's something like shopping; what is needed is chosen, and you can buy it either today or tomorrow.

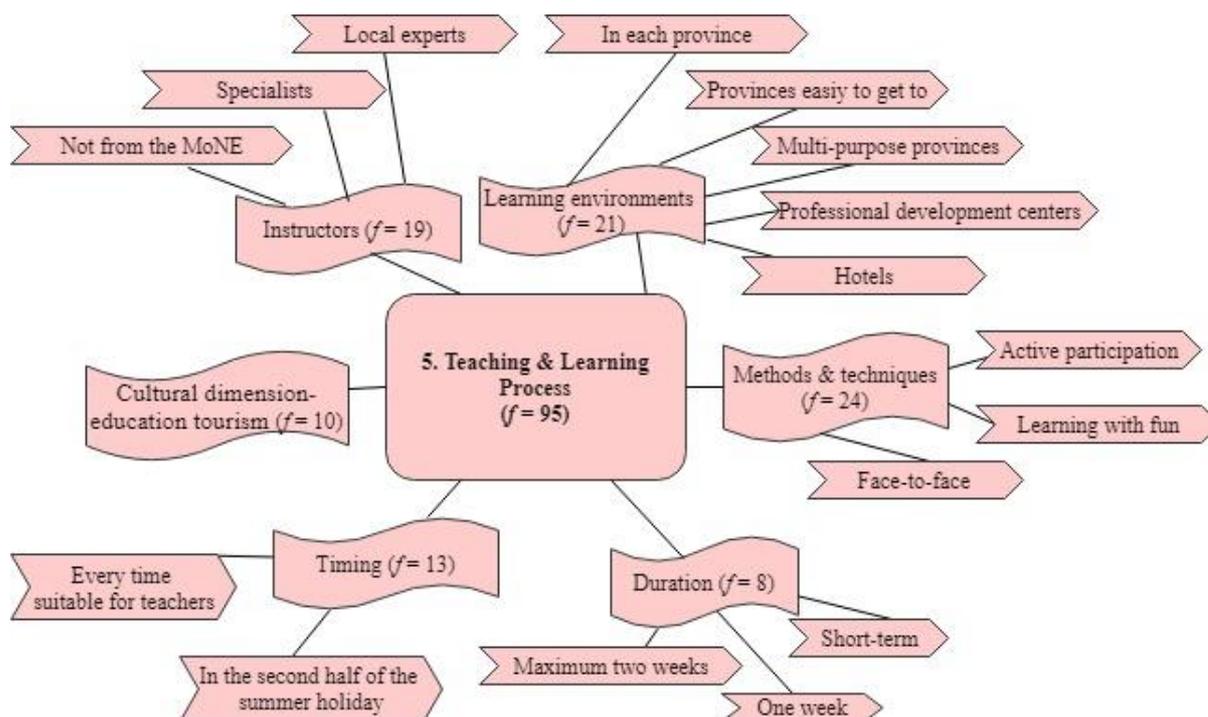


Figure 10. Preschool teachers' recommendations for learning and teaching processes of professional development activities during summer holidays

An important part of the preschool teachers' recommendations to increase their professional development relates to the learning and teaching processes of professional development activities. As can be seen in Figure 10, the suggestions included that expert trainers should be appointed to professional development activities (also expressed in Figure 5), and that teaching methods that support active participation and allow face-to-face interaction are preferred. In Figure 7, the preschool teachers stated that although they want distance professional development opportunities to be developed, they prefer face-to-face education in terms of supporting learning from colleagues and for professional socialization.

With regards to the preschool teachers thinking that professional development activities should not be too long, they suggested that they be as short as a 1-week duration, and that teachers should be offered various options as to when they can attend based on their convenience where possible. Some suggested that these activities should take place during the second part of the summer holidays so that they can also rest and prepare for the new school year.

Some of the preschool teachers, who thought that conducting professional development activities in remote places as being an obstacle to their participation, suggested that such activities should be held in every province where possible, or at least in provinces with easy

access in order to facilitate increased levels of participation. Additionally, some suggested that such activities should be organized in “multipurpose provinces” in terms of supporting both professional and personal development (e.g., Ankara: Anıtkabir; Çanakkale: Martyrs Monument, Trojan Horse; Konya: Mevlana Museum; Şanlıurfa: Göbekli Tepe). Some of the preschool teachers considered that professional development centers should be established in the main centers of attraction, such as where teachers could both take a vacation and also interact with colleagues from different parts of the country, whilst others mentioned that professional development activities could be organized in hotels with large facilities, as is the case in the private sector. Parallel to these suggestions, some of the preschool teachers suggested that a cultural dimension should be added to professional development activities and in this sense, “Education Tourism” policies could be developed, as in the example of health tourism.

P1. ...For example, Çanakkale, which is a place that everyone should go to. In other words, we can add something cultural besides just the academic training.

P15. In other words, if there is a professional development activity through which they can mentally feel relaxed and spend time with their family, like having a holiday and having fun, then I think greater participation levels will be achieved.

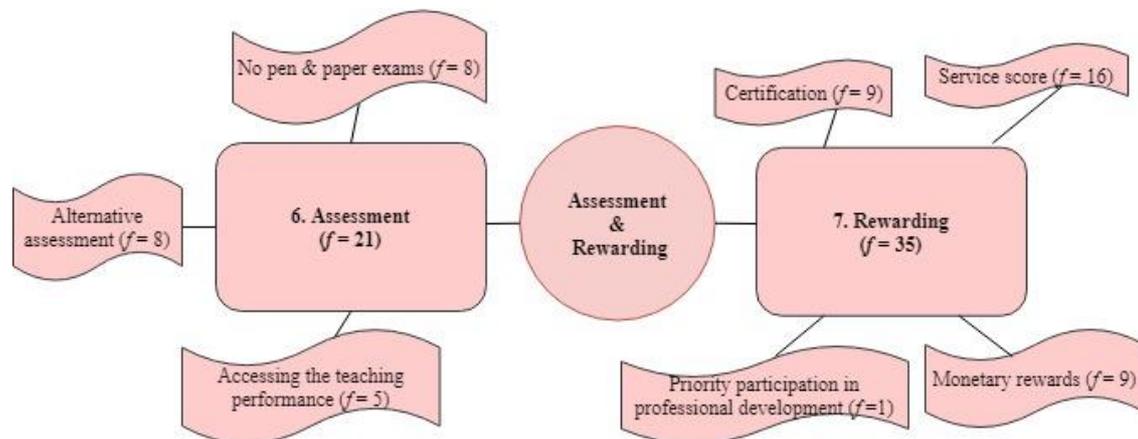


Figure 11. Preschool teachers’ recommendations about assessment in professional development activities and rewards afterwards

Figure 11 illustrates the assessment theme, and the participant preschool teachers suggested that classroom performance should be monitored instead of traditional exams being used for professional development activities, and that alternative assessment methods should be preferred where some form of assessment is required. The recommendations for promoting and sustaining professional development formed the theme of rewarding. In this context, some of the preschool teachers considered that a service score may be the best reward, similar to the previously known examples in eTwinning or career ladders. In this context, some of the preschool teachers mentioned that rewarding with increased points for participation during summertime professional development activities could strongly encourage the teachers to participate. In addition, some of the preschool teachers considered that additional tuition, as in the foreign language proficiency payments and in the career ladder practice, could be used as forms of reward. Some of the preschool teachers did not just look at the issue of rewarding from a financial perspective, and suggested that a certificate be given under the name of success, participation, acknowledgment, etc. for professional development activities, or by giving attendees future priority to participate in professional development activities organized at a later date as a form of reward.

P20. We started eTwinning voluntarily, but then when we heard of a 15 point service score, there was a boom. Everyone started to do eTwinning projects.

P21. I'll tell you the bitter truth... it is definitely a work-based system, and therefore they should make additional tuition payments... if the participation then does not reach 90%, I will quit this job.

P8. Is education equal to money? I don't know. So, are we selling our time or are we actually spending our time with students and thereby adding something to ourselves in the process?

P21. Let's say that a teacher participated in an activity and that a certificate of participation was recorded in the MEBBIS system; would they then use this in the classroom? It would be more logical to reflect any new knowledge to their class rather than simply as a personal gain.

4. Discussion

For most preschool teachers, the summer holidays mean going back home, meeting with family, taking a holiday, resting up, and a period of general refreshment; yet, unfortunately, it is rarely associated with a time for “professional development.” It can be said that the preschool teachers see their summer holiday break as an opportunity to get away from the profession, rather than an opportunity to seek out professional development. For the preschool teachers, the summer holidays primarily mean getting away from their place of work, school, and other elements of their professional; in their own words, “turning off the switches.”

The reason given for the preschool teachers' desire to distance themselves from the profession during the summer teaching break is their normally heavy workload of working with young children, and their starting from scratch in educating new groups of young students (and their parents) each year. As such, they do not have the luxury of building upon the previous years' experiences with their students as in other branches of teaching. Although it is not directly representative of preschool teachers, the TALIS 2018 results revealed that the time spent by teachers in Turkey on their professional activities per week (31.6%) was less than the OECD average of 38.8%, and that a significant proportion of their time was taken up with classroom-based teaching (Demirci-Celep, 2019). Teachers in Turkey are reportedly among those who spend the least amount of time on extracurricular activities such as class preparation, training, and the evaluation of student work. Similarly, in a study conducted by the OECD (2017), it was reported that the total annual legal working time of preschool teachers in Turkey (1,592 hours) was slightly lower than the OECD average of 1,608 hours. Despite teachers in Turkey having marginally less working hours, their class sizes and student/teacher ratio are considered as factors that may negatively affect their perception of the workload they face (Hacettepe University Education Faculty, 2017). However, according to data issued by the Turkish Ministry of National Education for 2019-2020 (MEB, 2020), there was a national average of 16 students per teacher in Turkish preschool education, which indicates that problems associated with large class sizes at the preschool level have been alleviated, although there are of course regional variances in this data. When these findings are considered together, it may be said that the preschool teachers' perception of their workload and, accordingly, of their professional development may differ from their colleagues from other countries who participated in TALIS 2018, and that they need to consider professional development from a more international perspective.

Another reason for preschool teachers wanting to “get away,” especially for the younger and newly-qualified teachers, is that they often are assigned/contracted to work in

disadvantaged areas located far from their families. The TALIS 2018 results showed that new teachers tend to work in schools with difficult conditions (OECD, 2019), and that Turkey is one of the leading countries in this regard (Çelikdemir, 2019). In order to eliminate regional differences in Turkey's education system (MEB, 2019b), since 2016, as a fixed-term first assignment model, novice teachers have been appointed to rural areas on a contractual basis (ERG, 2018). According to the latest regulation, teachers are obliged to work in the same region for at least 4 (3+1) years. There are examples of this practice in other countries also, the aim of which is to meet the teacher needs of disadvantaged regions by reducing the mobility of teachers in changing schools (Mostafa & Pál, 2018). However, Turkey is one of the countries with the highest rate of teachers changing school among all OECD countries and economies that participated in TALIS 2018 (OECD, 2019). Novice teachers often have to work in difficult conditions and are unable to find the required personal or professional support (Çelikdemir, 2019), and contracted teachers can feel intense levels of stress and thereby experience low motivation (Sunar, 2019, p. 75). Thus, preschool teachers see their summer holidays as a time to get away from their professional work, taking what in a sense is seen as a "professional break," whereby they can escape from the fatigue and stress caused by the workload and employment conditions specific to their field. Although for a small group of preschool teachers, summer holiday means refreshing themselves in preparation for the new school year, what is meant by refreshment here is to gain relief from their physical and mental fatigue, not some form of systematic preparation under the guise of professional development. Many preschool teachers find summer holidays unproductive for professional development. Therefore, while summer holidays mean "sacred times to breathe and reset" for most preschool teachers, it can also relate to a period of "disconnection" and "gaps that are then difficult to close" in terms of professional development.

Whilst being aware of the importance of professional development for teachers, most preschool teachers believe that there should be activities for professional development held during the summer holidays. However, some preschool teachers believe that the current professional development system for teachers in Turkey is not actually supportive in terms of their professional development, which does not make the training attractive. In TALIS 2008, teachers in Turkey drew attention as the group of teachers who received the least amount of inservice training, but needed the least inservice training in the following period (OECD, 2009). Teachers in public schools especially stated that this contradiction relates to their inservice training not having met their expectations. Approximately one in five teachers stated that the courses/workshops or conferences/seminars they attended did not actually contribute to their professional development (Büyüköztürk, Akbaba-Altun, & Yıldırım, 2010). The situation did not change in TALIS 2018 either, where the proportion of teachers (93.6%) who had attended at least one professional development activity in the last year was still slightly below that of the OECD average of 94.5%. In addition, Turkey is the sixth country with the lowest rate of teachers (71.8%) who think that the professional development activities they attend have a positive effect on their teaching practices (Çetinkaya-Aydın, 2019). The findings of the current study, which parallel to the results of both TALIS 2008 and TALIS 2018, can also be said to be in line with the findings of other studies reporting the inadequacies of teachers' professional development activities, which is considered a chronic educational problem in Turkey (e.g., Başaran, 2016; Kesen & Öztürk, 2019; Önen et al., 2009; TEDMEM, 2019).

When the preschool teachers' summer holiday professional development activities are examined, it can be seen that it parallels the meanings they attach to the term "summer holidays." While most of the preschool teachers take time for themselves during this period, by relaxing, spending time with their families and friends, some engage in non-systematic

professional development that includes reading books and journals or visiting museums, which they consider counts towards their professional development, and a limited number participate in systematic professional development activities. Some published studies have also reported a similar summer holiday schedule for other types of teachers (Patterson, 2014). In the current study, the preschool teachers saw their summer holidays as a very inefficient time in terms of professional development, and some preferred not to participate in any professional development activities during their summer holidays as they see it as a time to devote just to themselves. These professional development activities held during the school summer holidays can be grouped as 1) non-systematic activities such as self-research and reading professional literature on the subjects in which they consider themselves deficient, and 2) systematic activities such as courses and seminars. In terms of the systematic activities, it may be said that the preschool teachers in Turkey share a similar profile with those participating in TALIS 2018, both from Turkey and from other countries and economies, except that they participate in courses/seminars at a distance. With the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, preschool teachers have attended more distance courses/seminars through the Education Information Network of the MoNE. However, it should not be overlooked that the traditional structure, in which information transfer is dominant; and still continues, although there have been practices that support active participation such as question-answer and discussion sessions held more in recent courses and seminars (European Commission, 2021). In the current study, it was also observed that the preschool teachers did not participate in collaborative professional development activities such as colleague observation, coaching, learning from their peers, or participating in peer networks, unlike the teachers who participated in TALIS 2018 (OECD, 2019).

There are also other reasons for not participating in professional development activities during summer holidays related mostly to the preschool teachers themselves. They considered that the inservice training organized by the MoNE do not fit with their professional development needs, that they are not innovative in terms of content, teaching, or learning methods, and that the assigned trainers are not sufficiently competent. Opfer and Pedder (2011) also reported that the professional development activities offered by local or central education administrations often do not correspond to the needs of the teachers they are targeted towards. In the current study, the preschool teachers complained that subjects they are already familiar with since their initial teacher education are still used as content for their inservice training. This indicates that preservice and inservice training programs largely operate in isolation (European Commission, 2000). For one of the two teachers in TALIS 2018 from Turkey, the absence of a professional development activity that interested them was seen as an obstacle to their participation (Çetinkaya-Aydın, 2019). While the TALIS results show that teachers in Turkey mostly require professional development in terms of communication with those from different cultures/countries, teaching in multicultural/multilingual classes, and the education of students with special needs, the inservice training program offered by the MoNE during 2021 (MEB, 2021) do not appear to meet these needs when considering their content. Başaran (2016), who examined the MoNE's inservice training program, found that 111 of the 300 professional development activities planned were cancelled and that changes were made in 89 cases, indicating that the planning of the program did not adequately address the needs of the target audience. According to the preschool teachers in the current study, professional development activities that are created according to the professional and personal needs of teachers, that have content coherent with their needs, and that support their active learning and collaboration with colleagues, are the most effective examples of professional development activities (OECD, 2019). Therefore, the results of comprehensive studies such as TALIS should be interpreted appropriately for professional development activities either at the school level or held centrally, either during

the summer break or the school semester, and should be used as a guide to the development of professional development policies in Turkey.

In addition, problems experienced related to the announcement of professional development activities can negatively affect the preschool teachers' participation. Two main reasons were put forward for these problems; first, there are certain physical limitations for preschool teachers such as having to be in the classroom all through the school day or where the preschool classrooms are situated away from the school's administrative building. This means that preschool teachers are often unable to socialize with either the school administrators or with other teachers. In 2012, with the transition to a 12-year compulsory education system in Turkey, preschool teachers working in preschool classrooms in secondary school buildings became the most disadvantaged in this sense. The second reason given was that, in some cases, school administrators do not forward every announcement to preschool teachers as they are unable to find suitable substitute teachers, or that they are content with only conveying the mandatory announcements to their preschool teachers.

Another obstacle to the participation of preschool teachers in professional development activities relates to the policies of the MoNE. The main obstacles to participation are where professional development activities are organized in specific and generally remote cities, often held on inappropriate dates and open to only a limited number of teachers. Additionally, there is an issue whereby the teachers sent are not the most deserving to participate in such activities. While the TALIS 2018 data showed that a positive relationship exists between the state of receiving support for participating in professional development activities and for other types of professional development, it is interesting that although the percentage of teachers who stated having received support in Turkey was low, the number of types of professional development activities attended was high. This shows that while some teachers in Turkey cannot find support to participate in professional development activities, others have the opportunity to participate in different types of professional development (Güneş, 2016). This highlights the need for coherent policies to be developed that ensure the equitable distribution of professional development opportunities or a national level. According to the preschool teachers, because the professional development activities that are found attractive are organized only on certain dates and only for a very limited number of participants, they often miss out on such activities as there are no alternative activities held on different dates or in different locations. In addition, the excessive documentation required to apply for professional development activities and their prior experiences with the inefficiency of such activities were raised as a significant deterrent.

According to the preschool teachers, professional development policies in Turkey do not adequately encourage participation in such activities. They consider that there is a lack of understanding regarding professional development-based public service in Turkey in general, and accordingly in educational circles and amongst teachers in particular. Given that teachers' teaching practices (Le Donné, Fraser, & Bousquet, 2016) and professional self-efficacy (McLaughlin, 1992) are affected by the very culture of the school that they work in, teachers' motivation towards professional development may also be negatively affected in schools that do not actively support their professional development. TALIS 2018 presented similar results, that a lack of adequate incentive and employer support for the participation in professional development activities can be considered as obstacles to the professional development of teachers, both across the wider OECD and also in Turkey (OECD, 2019). On this, the preschool teachers stated that the professional development options offered during the school summer break are often limited and they are unaware of what is happening due to the lack of any central point that arranges all such activities and where teachers could easily see all the available professional development opportunities together in one place. In

addition, they stated that although they participate in professional development activities, their initiative goes unrewarded and sometimes the participation certificates received from other institutions or organizations, including other public institutions in Turkey, are not even recognized by the MoNE. The TALIS 2018 results showed that not only financial support such as salary increases, but also non-financial support such as flexible participation schedules can help to increase participation in professional development activities (OECD, 2019). In summary, the inadequacy of supervision and monitoring, the reward policies that should encourage professional development and subsequently to ensure its sustainability, can all negatively affect preschool teachers' perspectives of professional development, and that this situation becomes a vicious circle that negatively affects professional development throughout their career.

In education systems where teachers' participation in professional development activities is mandatory, access to professional development activities is guaranteed, but there is a risk that this does not allow teachers the necessary freedom to choose the professional development activities that best suits their needs (Scheerens, 2010). However, in the Turkish context there is a need for transformation towards more self-directed professional development, whereby teachers take more responsibility for their own professional development instead of being reliant upon centrally directed resources, which can be made more attractive through appropriate rewards or even being made mandatory for teachers (Sawyer, 2001). In fact, it is time for MoNE, which started this transformation with the School-Based Professional Development Model some 10 years ago, to develop and implement this model with more concrete and decisive steps (MEB, 2010). The results of studies conducted on inservice professional development activities in Turkey have shown that this is no longer a choice but a necessity (Kesen & Öztürk, 2019). The Singaporean education system presents an inspiring example of where professional development is seen as a shared vision between teachers and other educators (OECD, 2019). A shared vision and joint action among teachers and other educational staff leads in turn to improving the quality of teaching and subsequently to increasing institutional capacity (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007).

Another policy-related obstacle to participation relates to the employment conditions of preschool teachers in Turkey. The process of being appointed to the teaching profession and more importantly, the working conditions after having started work can negatively affect the teachers professional development. This highly competitive process (Başaran, 2016) consists of centralized written and oral exams during the recruitment process is seen as difficult for many candidate preschool teachers, and which can sometimes take years to accomplish. In this sense, the phenomenon of "unappointed teachers" in Turkey is well known (Çinkır & Kurum, 2017). Especially, according to one of the participant preschool teachers in the current study who is also a school principle, difficulties experienced with the process of being appointed can mean for some that their professional goals are met, and that young teachers do not then feel the need to set further goals to become a better teacher after having finally been appointed. For these preschool teachers, the personal benefits of the profession, such as having a regular income, outweigh the social benefits (Kohn, 1998). On the other hand, teachers who choose teaching for its social benefits tend to have higher participation in professional development activities (OECD, 2019). In light of these findings, it can be said that the acceptance of highly committed preservice teachers who care about their social contribution to the profession form a strategic move to help ensure the continuous professional development of preschool teachers.

Another obstacle related to preservice teachers' working conditions is society's tendency to see preschool teachers simply as "caregivers" (Zembar, 2012). This point of view,

especially in regions of low socioeconomic status, can lower the expectations of professional development from preschool teachers, which in turn makes them lose enthusiasm to seek professional development in their career. However, the TALIS 2018 results showed that teachers with low job satisfaction actually think more about moving to a better school or even abandoning the profession altogether (OECD, 2019).

On the basis of the obstacles stated, the preschool teachers put forward certain recommendations that may be grouped under the headings of “professional development policies,” “planning and preparation of professional development activities,” “content of professional development activities,” “learning and teaching processes,” and finally “evaluation and rewarding” in order to overcome the difficulties experienced by preschool teachers in relation to their professional development during the school summer holidays.

The first recommendation from the preschool teachers was to develop national policies that promote professional development and ensure its sustainability. According to Antoniou and Kyriakides (2013), it is time for teachers to abandon the dream that they will simply become better and more effective teachers over time. Research results have shown that even teachers who have gone through the same professional development activities can be affected by these activities in different ways (Guskey, 1994) depending on the context they teaching, and this also supports the recommendation of the preschool teachers in the current study. Parallel to Schleicher’s proposals (2020), the preschool teachers also consider that the first thing to establish would be a qualified professional development system, with policies developed to ensure the selection of highly committed candidates for teaching, to determine national professional development standards, and to train teachers in line with these standards. According to the preschool teachers, for the sustainability of the professional development system, teachers should be inculcated with an appropriate understanding regarding continuous professional development, and that professional development should be both compulsory and supervised. Unlike in many OECD and EU countries, professional development is not compulsory for teachers in Turkey other than at the novice stage of their teaching careers (Çelik & Bozgeyikli, 2019), which seems related to the inability to develop a continuous professional development culture amongst Turkish teachers. Participation in professional development activities appears to be higher in countries where participation is mandatory, either directly (as a legal requirement) or indirectly (as a career advancement tool) (OECD, 2020); however, their possible effects on teacher autonomy should not be overlooked. At this point, development and dissemination in Turkey of the School-Based Professional Development Model, which sees professional development as part of a teacher’s job and is based on cooperation between teachers (Opfer, 2016), would be a good start.

The preschool teachers also suggested some innovative policy recommendations related to the promotion, recognition, and rewarding of professional development. First is the provision of equitable professional development incentives, such as priority given to teachers working in underprivileged areas for acceptance to professional development activities, and the awarding of more points for participation in professional development activities scheduled during the school summer break (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). The second recommendation was that the MoNE should recognize certificates awarded for participation in professional development activities organized by institutions and organizations other than the MoNE. In this context, the teachers suggested that the expertise gained after having participated in activities organized by other institutions/organizations should be fully appreciated, and that their participation should be taken into account in their school appointments or professional advancement. As such, the scores collected from having participated in professional development activities should be reflected in their salaries, all of which takes places in other countries (OECD, 2013). The fact that some preschool teachers

do not have such high expectations and only expect verbal recognition demonstrates the depth of the need for more formalized recognition of teachers' professional development. These recommendations support research that has suggested that the teacher career ladder system, introduced into the Turkish education system in 2006 but suspended due to certain objections, should be reintroduced as a means of supporting the professional development of preschool teachers (Kaplan & Gülcan, 2020).

As an even more innovative policy, the preschool teachers recommended the creation of wider professional development opportunities, similar to mobility programs for learning and teaching such as Erasmus+, that would facilitate collaboration with and learning from other teaching colleagues (Avalos, 2011; Hamos et al., 2009; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Both inservice teachers (Bozak, Konan, & Özdemir, 2016) and preservice teachers (Ersoy, 2013; Ersoy & Günel, 2011) who participated in EU education programs consider that participating in such activities can positively affect teachers' professional development. Providing teachers and other education personnel with quality professional learning opportunities and maintaining their professional development throughout their careers are already international policy priorities set to be accomplished by 2030 (Council of the European Union, 2021; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2016). For this reason, it is thought that the European Teacher Academies, which are planned to be opened within the scope of the Erasmus+ Program, and the Teacher Support Centers, which the MoNE has attempted to integrate into the Turkish education system in recent years, could play a significant role in the professional development of preschool teachers in Turkey (Koyuncu & Düşkün, 2020).

The preschool teachers also made recommendations under planning and preparation, content, learning-teaching processes, and evaluation for the enhancement of their professional development. Those preschool teachers who believe that the existing professional development activities are not suited to their needs, and that the accession process is somewhat tedious are of the opinion that the accession process as well as the planning and preparation of the existing professional development system could be improved. They suggested that in order to prepare a professional development plan that is appropriately suited to the actual needs of the teachers being targeted, a robust needs analysis should be conducted and that professional development programs should be developed based on those needs and announced to all teachers using more appropriate and effective means. The preschool teachers recommended the establishment of a national professional development portal in compliance with the spirit of the digital age in order that all teachers can keep themselves fully aware of the opportunities that are available to them. Using such a portal, the preschool teachers would be able to see all the professional development opportunities organized throughout both Turkey and abroad, online or face-to-face, organized by the MoNE or through institutions/organizations accredited by the MoNE, be able to choose the most suitable activities based on their own professional needs, and to even suggest alternative subjects with which they may need training. The preschool teachers actually emphasized their professional autonomy in a sense (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). As for the accession process, they suggested a reduction in the paperwork associated with applying for professional development activities, and ensuring that the most suitable teachers are able to participate in such activities, i.e., ensuring that allocation is merit-based.

According to the preschool teachers, the content of professional development activities should be created in accordance with the specific needs of the target attendees. They recommended that professional development content be created according to a more holistic approach that is up-to-date, interesting, innovative, and conducive to both the professional and personal development of the target teachers (Sancar et al., 2021).

The heading including the highest number of recommendations put forward by the preschool teachers relates to the teaching-learning processes of professional development activities. The preschool teachers believe that information suited to their professional and personal development can be gained through learning and teaching activities that support their active participation. The appointment of expert trainers for professional development activities was suggested, as was the use of alternative assessment and evaluation methods in order to evaluate the outcomes of such activities. Increased distance education opportunities for professional development were also suggested as an alternative, but it was noted that they preferred face-to-face training where possible in order to best support their learning from colleagues and for the purposes of improved professional socialization. According to the preschool teachers, flexible schedules should be offered in terms of time and place so as to increase the participation of teachers. They proposed the development of policies under the theme of “Education Tourism” for professional development activities; thereby training activities could be rendered more enjoyable and which may lead to increased participation.

Finally, the preschool teachers put forward suggestions regarding the evaluation and rewarding of participation in professional development activities. Instead of traditional paper-based exams, as used in the existing professional development activities, the preschool teachers suggested investigating how professional development activities could improve the quality of teaching and how they could be best reflected in the attendees’ classroom performance and their students’ success based on in-class methods of observation, supplemented with data provided by the teacher. For this purpose, Turkey’s participation in the coming cycles of the TALIS Video Study, which it chose not to participate in 2018, could help to provide an international perspective based on the data from the Turkish context (OECD, 2019).

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, for most preschool teachers in Turkey, the school summer break is a time to get away from teaching and the school environment, to rest up and spend time with their family and friends. The preschool teachers consider professional development necessary during the summer holidays, but they find that period somewhat inefficient for their professional development. Whilst they may engage in professional self-development activities, their participation in systematic professional development activities was notably minimal. The main reasons put forward for this include the education system not encouraging their professional development, the process not being supervised or appropriately rewarded, there being little or no understanding regarding continuous professional development among preschool teachers, that the working conditions of preschool teachers are difficult at best, low expectations from preschool teachers about their professional development, that they are not well informed about professional development activities or the opportunities available to them, that no portal exists through which they can obtain information about relevant professional development activities, that the professional development activities they previously attended were ineffective, that there are few or no professional development activities that are actually suited to their needs and interests, and that their participation in professional development activities is not considered a criterion for any financial gain or career advancement.

The preschool teachers recommended the creation of a professional development portal where they could see all the professional development opportunities available to them, use of effective announcement ways, the appointment of expert trainers to deliver professional development activities, greater suitability of professional development activities that are tied to their actual needs, the use of holistic content that supports their professional and personal

development, the use of teaching methods that support their active participation, the evaluation of learning outcomes using alternative measurement and evaluation tools, and the recognition and rewarding of the expertise gained through having attended professional development activities either through financial or non-financial means.

This study presents the opinions and recommendations of 24 preschool teachers regarding professional development during the school summer holidays, and which were collected through interviews. Future research could replicate this work using alternative research methods, larger groups of preschool teachers or with teachers from other fields.

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