

The Profile of Turkish Pre-School Teachers

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Abstract

The significant technological advances observed in the 21st century and resulting sociological changes require social adaptation. These changes created an essential role for the teachers to instruct the changing qualifications. The present study aimed to determine the profile of preschool teachers in Turkey. Thus, this research was designed as a descriptive study. The study group included 652 teachers. Most of the teachers participating in the research were female participants. Most of the teachers are graduates of pre-school education. However, there are also teachers who have graduated from child development and other fields. The "Turkish Preschool Education Student Profile Questionnaire" developed by Erkan et al. (2001) was adapted by the authors to research the teacher profile. When the findings were examined, it was found that 86% of the teachers participated in educational activities, and these educational activities generally participated in in-service trainings, scientific conferences and cultural events belonging to the ministry; they usually participate in these activities whenever they have the opportunity; the reasons for participating in educational activities are usually due to the lack of time and family situations; It has been determined that the hobbies of teachers are reading books, music, movies, theater and social media. In addition, it was determined that most of the teachers willingly chose pre-school education, as the reason for this, they generally showed that they love children and love to teach. Teachers stated that they volunteered to be a preschool teacher and that they love and care about children. The findings are discussed in the light of the relevant literature. Then recommendations are given.

Keywords: Early childhood education, preschool teacher, profile, Turkey.

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Türkiye Okul Öncesi Öğretmeleri Profili Araştırması

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Öz

21. yüzyıl ile ortaya çıkan muazzam teknolojik değişim ve buna bağlı olarak gelişen sosyolojik değişim, toplumların bu süreci yaratmasını ve buna uyum sağlamasını zorunlu kılmıştır. Bu süreçte yaşanan değişimin bir sonucu olarak öğretmenler, değişen niteliklerin topluma aktarılmasında önemli bir role sahiptir. Bu araştırma, Türkiye'de çalışmakta olan okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin profilini belirlemeyi amaçlamıştır. Bu amaçla bu araştırma, betimsel araştırma ile desenlendirilmiştir. Çalışma grubu 652 öğretmenden oluşmaktadır. Araştırmaya katılan öğretmenlerin çoğunu kadın katılımcılar oluşturmuştur. Öğretmenlerin çoğu okul öncesi eğitimi mezundur. Bununla birlikte çocuk gelişimi ve diğer alanlardan mezun olan öğretmenler de mevcuttur. Erkan ve diğerleri tarafından 2001 yılında geliştirilen "Türkiye'de Okul Öncesi Eğitim Öğrenci Profiline Ait Anket" araştırmacılar tarafından uyarlanarak öğretmen profili için uygun hale getirilmiştir. Bulgular incelendiğinde öğretmenlerin %86'sının eğitsel aktivitelere katıldığı, bu eğitsel aktivitelerin genellikle bakanlığa ait hizmet içi eğitimler, bilimsel konferanslar ve kültürel etkinlikler olduğu; bu etkinliklere genellikle fırsat bulduklarında katıldıkları; eğitsel etkinliklere katılma nedenlerinin genellikle zaman bulma sıkıntısı ve ailesel durumlardan kaynaklı olduğu; öğretmenlerin hobilerinin kitap okuma, müzik, film, tiyatro ve sosyal medya şeklinde sıralandığı belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca öğretmenlerin birçoğu isteyerek okul öncesi eğitimi seçtiğini, bunun nedeni olarak da genellikle çocukları ve öğretmeyi sevmelerini belirtmiştir. Öğretmenler, okul öncesi öğretmenliğini isteyerek yaptıklarını, çocukları sevdiklerini ve önemsediklerini belirtmişlerdir. Bulgular ilgili alanyazın ışığında tartışılmıştır. Ardından önerilere yer verilmiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Erken çocukluk eğitimi, okul öncesi öğretmeni, profil, Türkiye

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Introduction

As reported by international educators, researchers and policy makers, the support and improvement of child development in early years maximizes academic achievement (Collie, Shopka, Perry, & Martin, 2015). Furthermore, it contributes to training individuals competent in social requirements. It is known that the quality and quality of educational activities conducted in educational institutions are important to meet competent human resource requirements. One of the most critical factors in this process is the teachers. Instructional strategies, materials, and activities employed by the teachers in the classroom are also significant factors (Erkan et al., 2002). Teacher experiences and beliefs also play a key role (Collie, Shopka, Perry, & Martin, 2015).

Concerns about teacher competencies, behavior, and traits have not been resolved or described. Teachers belong to a diverse, heterogeneous, contradictory, and changing professional group (Fernandez-Berruero & Sanchez-Taragaza, 2014). The significant technological advances of the 21st century and resulting sociological changes require social development and adaptation. Due to these requirements, teachers should play a key role in the transfer of these new requirements to the society (MEB, 2017). A review of the "General Teaching Profession Competencies" published by the Ministry of National Education (2017) would reveal that these competencies are categorized into three fields: professional knowledge, professional skills, attitudes, and values. Vocational knowledge includes field content, field education, legal knowledge, vocational skills such as education planning, development of instructional environments, management of the instruction and learning processes, and measurement and evaluation, attitudes and values include national, spiritual, and universal values, attitudes towards the students, communication and cooperation, and personal and professional development. Recent literature reviews and meta-analyses demonstrated that high-performance schools include professional learning communities, which are important for the development and achievements of the children (Fulton & Britton, 2011; Lomos, Hofman & Bosker, 2011; Scheerens, 2014; Warwas & Helm, 2018). Thus, it is essential to determine the current status of the teachers.

Profile research describes the current status of the target audience, which includes the research population, based on various variables. The required data on the cultural context, socio-demographic factors, and individual traits are collected in all educational fields (Erkan et al. 2002). The review of the profile studies on education revealed that these studies were conducted with teachers in different branches such as physics and geography (Abazaoğlu, Yıldızhan & Yıldırım, 2012; Abazaoğlu & Yıldızhan, 2012; Aladağ, 2003; Tufan 2006), pre-service teachers (Altunoğlu et al., 2006; Orhan et al. Akkoyunlu, 2003; Çevik & Yiğit, 2009; Erkan et al., 2002; Kızılcıoğlu, 2003; Onural, 2005), and academic staff (Karakütük et al., 2008; Mercan Uzun, Akman, Akgül & Yazıcı, 2017). However, no study that specifically investigated the profiles of preschool teachers could be identified. The review of the 11th Development Plan revealed that preschool education was compulsory for five years or older children as of 2023. Thus, preschool education is mandatory in Turkey. It is known that early childhood education programs are also early intervention programs. The inclusion of socio-culturally and socioeconomically disadvantaged children in preschool education is vital for the child and the society. It was determined that every dollar spent on Head Start, one of the oldest early childhood intervention programs in the United States, returns nine dollars to the state. It was determined that the number of participating children who completed their education was higher than those who did not, these were less driven to crime, and used less social assistance. This revealed the significance of quality early childhood education. The functions of the teacher are indisputably one of the most critical factors to achieve quality education. It is essential for teachers to constantly self-renew and follow the current literature and current knowledge on all related fields such as technology and literature. Thus, the present study aimed to investigate the profile of preschool teachers and the following research questions were determined.

1. What is the participation level of preschool teachers in educational activities?
2. What are the hobbies of preschool teachers?
3. What are the views of preschool teachers on preschool instruction?

Method

Research Design

The present study employed the descriptive research method. The method aims to describe a given situation as precisely as possible. In this method, researchers attempt to describe and summarize various group characteristics (skills, preferences, demographics, tendencies, etc.) (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

Study Sample

Turkish preschool population includes individuals associated with education. The study data were collected from teachers employed in seven geographical regions and selected with the convenience sampling method. The authors controlled the data, and the teachers who did not respond to more than one section of the data collection questionnaire were excluded from the study, and the study sample included 652 teachers. The basic participant demographics are presented in Table.

Table 1.
Participant demographics

Variable		
Gender	N	%
Female	606	92,94
Male	43	6,60
No response	3	0,46
Total	652	100,00
Marital Status		
Married	415	63,65
Single	236	36,20
Total	652	100,00
Age		
21-25	143	21,9
26-2	142	21,8
30-34	191	29,3
35-39	110	16,9
40-44	42	6,4
45+	16	2,5
No response	8	1,2
Total	652	100,0
Geographical Region	N	%
Black Sea	40	6,1
Central Anatolia	118	18,1
Aegean	95	14,6
Mediterranean	41	6,3
Eastern Anatolia	152	23,3
Southeastern Anatolia	41	6,3
Marmara	131	20,1
No response	34	5,2
Total	652	100,0
Family	N	%
Nuclear	516	79,1
Extended	29	4,4
Living alone	67	10,3
Living with friend(s)	47	3,7
Other	22	2,1
No response	2	0,3
Total	652	100,0
Monthly income	N	%
Less than TL 2500	36	5,52
TL 2500-3999 TL	95	14,57
More than TL 4000	445	68,25
No response	76	11,66
Total	652	100

Residence	N	%
Self-owned	300	46,01
Rental	348	53,37
No response	4	0,61
Total	652	100,0

As seen in Table 1, about 93% of the participants were female, and about 64% were married. Most teachers were 21-34 years old. 79% lived in a nuclear family. 462% owned their homes, while 53% were tenants. Educational level and employment status of the participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Educational level and employment status of the participants

Variable	N	%
Educational Level	N	%
Girls' vocational school-child development	7	1,1
Associate degree- child development	28	4,3
Bachelors' degree- child development	20	3,1
Early childhood education	528	81,0
Master/PhD	55	8,4
Other	7	1,1
No response	7	1,1
Total	652	100,0
School type	N	%
Kindergarten	274	72,7
Private kindergarten	54	8,3
Private nursery school	10	1,5
Institutional kindergarten	48	7,4
Other	53	8,1
No response	13	2,0
Total	652	100,0
Seniority (year)	N	%
1-5	270	41,4
6-10	120	18,4
11-15	34	5,2
16-20	13	2,0
21-25	11	1,7
No response	55	8,5
Total	652	100,0
Current residence	N	%
Urban center	386	59,2
Township	192	29,4
Village	58	8,9
No response	16	2,5
Total	652	100,0

As seen in Table 2, 81% of the preschool teachers were preschool teaching department graduates. Most worked in kindergartens. About 60% had 1-10 years of experience. 59% worked in urban centers, 29% worked in district centers, and about 9% worked in villages.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

The study data were collected with the "Turkish Preschool Education Student Profile Questionnaire" developed by Erkan et al. (2001) and adopted by the authors to include the field teachers. The questionnaire includes 24 questions. The draft questionnaire items were reviewed by 2 measurement and 5 field experts, and the questionnaire was finalized after revisions conducted to implement the reviewer comments.

Data Analysis

The study data were analyzed on the SPSS software. The data collection instrument aims to describe individual behavior, beliefs, living conditions, or attitudes. The data collection instrument was free and could be applied to large groups quite easily. The questionnaire allows the collection of data on more than one property of an individual or group (Büyüköztürk, 2005; Erkuş, 2010). Thus, frequency and percentage analysis was conducted.

Ethical Procedures

Ethics committee approval was obtained from Ondokuz Mayıs University for this research. Decision number: 2018/293.

Findings

1. Participation of the Teachers in Educational Activities

Participation of the teachers in educational activities is presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Participation of the teachers in educational activities

	N	%
Yes	563	86,3
No	72	11,0
No response	17	2,6
Total	652	100,0

As seen in Table 3, 86.3% of the participating teachers participated in educational activities, while 11% did not. Table 4 presents the educational activities that teachers participated.

Table 4.

Distribution of the Activities that Preschool Teachers Participated

Activity	N	%
MONE in-service training seminars	398	70,7
Scientific conferences, seminars, and workshops organized by universities	265	47,1
Cultural events	260	46,2
Scientific conferences, seminars, and workshops organized by publishing houses	236	41,9
Artistic events	209	37,1
Training seminars organized by NGOs	207	36,8
Distance education seminars	114	20,2
Educational trips on alternative educational approaches organized by the private sector	100	17,8
Other	12	2,1

As seen in Table 4, preschool teachers mostly participated in in-service training courses organized by the Ministry of National Education. This was followed by scientific activities organized by universities, cultural events, scientific activities organized by publishing houses, artistic events, training seminars organized by NGOs, distance education seminars, and educational trips. The frequency of the participation in educational activities by the preschool teachers is presented in Table 5.

Table 5.
The participation frequencies of Preschool Teachers in Educational Activities

Frequency	N	%
When I can find time	290	51,5
Rarely	159	28,2
At every opportunity	107	19,0
Usually	58	10,3
No response	1	0,2
Total	563	100,0

As seen in Table 5, 51.5% of the teachers participated in educational activities whenever they could, followed by rarely, at every opportunity and usually. The reasons for non-participation are presented in Table 6.

Table 6.
The reasons for non-participation in Educational Activities

	N	%
I do not have time	18	25,0
I have no one to take care of my child while I participate	14	19,4
I have no financial means	9	12,5
Not enough activities are available	8	11,1
Transportation problems	7	9,7
I do not want to participate	5	6,9
I consider myself adequate, I do not need training	2	2,8

As seen in Table 6, 25% of the preschool teachers did not participate in educational activities due to lack of time, followed by reasons such as no one to take care of the child, lack of financial means, lack of activities, transportation problems, lack of willingness to participate, and self-sufficiency.

3. Teachers' Hobbies

The hobbies of the preschool teachers are presented in Table 7.

Table 7.
The Hobbies of Preschool Teachers

Hobby	N	%
Reading books	438	67,2
Music/concert	359	55,1
Movies	352	54,0
Theatre	258	39,6
Social media	226	34,7
Sports	196	30,1
Handicrafts	189	29,0
Photography	102	15,6
Folk dances	86	13,2
PC Games	40	6,1

As seen in Table 7, most of the participating teachers liked to read (67.2%), listen to music / attending concerts (55.1%), and watching movies (54%). These hobbies were followed by theater /

drama (39.6%), social media (34.7%), sports (30.1%), and handicrafts (29%). It was observed that only 6.1% of the teachers played computer games.

4. Teacher Views on Preschool Instruction

The views of preschool teachers on preschool instruction are presented in Table 8.

Voluntary selection of Preschool Instruction		
Voluntary	N	%
Yes	550	84,4
No	89	13,7
No response	13	2,0
Total	652	100,0
Reason	N	%
I love kids	365	56,0
I love teaching	362	55,5
Easy employment	170	26,1
Parental recommendation	95	14,6
Graduation from a vocational high school	73	11,2
Adequate grades for the department	76	11,7
University education in the same field	44	6,7
Professional willingness of Preschool Teachers		
Willingness	N	%
Yes	616	94,5
No	22	3,4
No response	14	2,1
Total	652	100,0
Reason	N	%
Caring about and love for the teaching profession	506	82,1
Love for children	358	58,1
Patriotic reasons	336	54,5
Professional development via higher education at an university during employment	43	7,0
Prestige of the profession	36	5,8
Adequate salary	26	4,2
Education opportunities abroad	9	1,5
Employment opportunities abroad	8	1,3

As seen in Table 8, about 85% of preschool teachers voluntarily selected preschool education positions. It was observed that the reasons for this selection were love for children and teaching, easy employment, parental recommendation, graduation from a vocational high school, adequate grade for admission to the department, and to continue tertiary education during employment. Table 8 demonstrated that about 95% of the teachers loved the profession. They cared about the profession and loved the teaching profession, loved children, wanted to be useful for the country and the society, desired professional development by continuing higher education, considered teaching a prestigious profession, their salaries adequate, thought that they would have education and employment opportunities abroad.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Since children are the most important element in a society, the individuals who educate them are also quite important. Especially preschool teachers play a key role in the child's love for education. The present study aimed to determine the profile of preschool teachers. 93% of the participating teachers were female, which was an expected findings based on the HEC Atlas data on Turkey. According to the

Higher Education Atlas, individuals who prefer preschool teaching in Turkey were predominantly women. Coral Long et al. (2017) investigated the distribution of pre-service preschool teachers in Turkey, and reported that the majority were women. However, the number of male pre-service preschool teachers has been on the increase. For example, only two male students attended Hacettepe University Preschool Education Department in 2007, the same number was 16 in 2019.

It was determined in the study that 86% of the participating preschool teachers participated in educational activities. This was a positive finding. Furthermore, the participant responses revealed that teachers usually responded each question with 2-3 answers, demonstrating that they preferred more than one method of self-improvement. Based on the educational activities preferred by the teachers, 71% of the teachers preferred in-service training courses organized by the Ministry of National Education, followed by cultural activities, scientific events, workshops, and seminars organized by universities and publishing houses. Literature review demonstrated that previous studies reported similar findings. In a study conducted by Fernandez-Berrueco and Sanchez-Taragaza with secondary education teachers in 2014, it was determined that teachers worked for professional development. The study was conducted before the pandemic. This could explain why the responses on online education was only 20%. Before the pandemic, conferences, workshops and training courses were generally conducted face to face. After the pandemic, all educational and scientific activities were conducted online. A pre-pandemic study conducted by Ally (2019) interviewed 34 experts in six countries. These experts stated that they considered online education important for the education of all individuals, their access to educational materials and knowledge. After the pandemic, information needs have been provided with online training.

The analysis of the reasons for not participating in educational activities demonstrated that the responses included the lack of time, lack of caregivers for their children during their absence, and lack of financial means. Only one international conference on preschool education was organized in Turkey. The International Preschool Conference is held every two years and the last was organized online in 2021. The student conference has been organized every year and the last one was organized in Istanbul in 2019. The student conference that was planned for 2020 in Antalya was postponed due to the pandemic. The fact that conference were not held continuously in provinces such as Ankara and Istanbul, which are relatively easy to access, could be the reason why teachers could not attend conferences.

The preschool teacher responses on voluntary selection of the profession revealed that 84% attended the preschool education department willingly. The reasons for the selection of preschool teaching undergraduate programs included the love of the participants for children and the profession. It was a satisfactory finding that teachers selected the undergraduate school consciously and willingly. 95% of the preschool teachers stated that they loved their profession, they cared about their profession, loved children, and wanted to be useful for their country. In a study conducted by Su (1996) in the USA, it was determined that the reasons for pre-service teachers' career choice were job satisfaction, love for children, social participation, and to help children. Similarly, in a study conducted by Erkan et al. (2002) with pre-service preschool teachers, it was determined that the participants preferred preschool teaching mostly because they loved children and teaching. In a study conducted by Çetin (2012), it was determined that pre-service teachers selected the department primarily due to their love for the profession. Thus, the present study findings were consistent with the literature.

The following could be recommended based on the present study findings:

Participant demographics demonstrated that the sample included only a few male teachers. MNE, YOK, NGO seminars on preschool education in high schools could explain the reason for female dominance in the profession.

Participant responses revealed that not all teachers participated in in-service training. However, in-service training could allow the teachers to learn about new techniques and developments. Thus, MEB could require attendance in in-service training and control attendance.

The teachers mentioned lack of financial reasons for unattendance in educational activities. Teacher quotas for free attendance in certain conferences, symposiums etc. could be increased.

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