Research Article

The Study of Preschool Teachers' and Principals' Opinions on Turkish Education System

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Abstract:

The present study was conducted to find out preschool teachers' and principals' opinions on the problems of the Turkish education system as well as their opinions on potential solutions. The sample of the study was preschool teachers' and principals' from Alanya, a district of the province of Antalya, Turkey. In the study group, there were 89 female participants that were determined via convenience sampling method. Qualitative research method and content analysis technique were used to analyze the data. When the findings are examined in line with the sub-goals, it was seen that the opinions gathered under four categories: "education system", "teachers' rights", "family" and "other". The problems expressed in this direction were the quality of the education system, continuously changing programs and applications, inequality of opportunities, test-focused system, crowded classes, and lack of funds supporting education and teaching in the form of double-schedule education. It is recommended that continuity of this study should be ensured via quantitative and mixed methods, and all stakeholders' opinions should be taken into consideration.

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INTRODUCTION

Education not only enables and empowers individuals to make the best use of their potential in the future, but also plays a fundamental role in shaping individuals into active and responsible citizens of society. A self-confident, educated person knows how to thrive in society. Education makes it possible for us to use our skills constructively in order to achieve success in life (Demirel et al., 2001). Developed nations have put great importance and effort into their public education systems. It is seen that their placement of modern and scientific methods at the helm during the development of their education systems has brought about great strides in the progress of their societies, innovation and industries. Although Turkey has taken key steps and has been consistently focused on developing a high-quality educational system for all of its people, it still continues to deal with some crucial issues. Preschool teachers are the primary people responsible for meeting children's educational and developmental needs. Preschool principals are responsible for managing and coordinating the work and development of the institution. They guide preschool teachers in the preparation of annual and daily plans and other activities according to the curriculum (MEB, 1993; Aral, Kandır & Can Yaşar, 2000; MEB, 2002).

The current format of the education system in Turkey consists of a 12-year compulsory education, covering students aged 6 to 18. However, preschool education is not compulsory. Prior to enrollment at a university, most students are educated in either public schools or private education institutions, which are generally tuition-free. Students are subjected to a central exam in the transition to high school (LGS Exam) and university level (YKS Exam). The pressure of placement into high schools and universities in the Turkish education system creates a lot of stress for most students. This situation is fed by a dominant ideology within Turkish society; believing nothing valuable can be achieved in one's life without going to university. Unfortunately, this perception creates pressure on all stakeholders from preschool to graduate education and on the overall education system (MEB, 2012; TED, 2007).

As in all developed countries, Turkey also supports its education system so that the quality, operability and efficiency of education can be increased. Nevertheless, there are still various issues to address regarding education in Turkey. Many issues have been explored within studies conducted by education experts, as well as within the institutional research reports of the associations/trade unions and the Ministry of National Education. Based on the opinions of various education stakeholders in recent years, the main problems stated in field studies are in the following areas: Lack of equipment/resources resulting from economic inadequacies. Teacher training and inefficiency of in-service training, assignments and teachers' appointments. Students' low level of success, motivation and behavioral problems. Families not supporting education adequately. The curricula being very intensive and disengaged from real life. The course types and long courses, short recess time, inadequate implementation, and lack of time for social activities. Education managers'

discretion and lack of education supervision being influenced by ideological views of education policies, lack of a certain education philosophy, lack of importance given to vocational and technical education, and inequalities in access to education (Kösterelioğlu & Bayar, 2014; Pınar, 2016; Şener, 2018; Taşdemir, 2015; Yeşil & Şahan, 2015).

In line with political decisions, teachers are the ones who give life to the curriculums which shape students' educational experiences. When asked about their opinions, teachers will explain how they behave in their schools, classrooms and practices, and ultimately explain what happens in their day-to-day environment. If the education policies do not adequately build upon teachers' experiences and expertise, then teachers will not be empowered to help students reach successful learning outcomes. Therefore, getting teachers' opinions on the education system will contribute significantly to the development of the system (Hattie & Marsh, 2002; Uslu, 2019).

The present study is aimed at acting on the basis of the opinions of teachers and principals in preschool education institutions in Turkey, as well as problems existing in the Turkish education system overall, to determine solutions to these problems. Problems and quality issues encountered in any dimension or level of education affect not only their discrete structure and level but impact other levels of education as well (TED, 2007). Therefore, it can be said that preschool teachers and principals can have a satisfactory grasp of the problems and solutions regarding the education system in general. The present study emphasizes that revisions which have been previously made to the education system are not sufficient. In addition, this study has been found to be important to help preschool teachers and principals make their voice heard in determining the concrete steps to be taken. Fortunately, during the data analysis and writing process for this research, some of the study's solution recommendations from the participants' views have begun to be implemented, including the appointment of a new Minister of Education who has vast experience in the field of education.

In this study, although teachers differ in terms of their preschool, primary and secondary education levels (approaches to students, methods they use, the content they teach, the environments they organize, etc.), all teachers have significant authority and responsibility for the operation of the education system. Teachers have important powers, responsibilities, functions and information for the functioning of the educational system in all teaching levels (Hattie & Marsh, 2002). There have been studies in the literature that were aimed to find out the problems encountered in the Turkish education system, and in most of these studies, the sample groups were formed with teachers and the data gathered via their opinions. Şener (2018) conducted a study with 96 teachers and asked them open-ended questions such as, "Can you list the current problems in the national education system?" Kösterlioğlu & Bayar (2014) carried out a study with 23 teachers who were studying in the Master Program in Classroom Teaching, and their question was, "What are the most common problems in the Turkish education system today?" Another study that Boydak

Özan & Yaraş (2017) conducted included 30 school administrators and 10 teachers who had a master's degree in the Department of Educational Administration Inspection, Planning and Economics at Fırat University in the Institute of Educational Sciences. There have been additional studies conducted with teacher candidates (Taşdemir, 2015; Yeşil & Şahan, 2015). Research conducted by Yılmaz and Altınkurt (2011) had concluded that a problem at any level in the Turkish education system can become common problems seen at all levels of education. Açıkgenç (2009) stated that the problems in the education system are not independent from each other and the "fragmentary approach" in education is the basis of the problems. Taking all these into consideration, the present study was conducted in order to seek answers to the following questions based on the opinions of preschool teachers and principals:

1. What are preschool teachers' and principals' opinions on the problems of the Turkish education system?

2. What are preschool teachers' and principals' solution suggestions to the problems of the Turkish education system?

METHOD

In this study, qualitative research method has been used, which is characterized by case study. Case study is a deep examination of a limited system (Cresswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). The situation can be a single person, a program, a group, an institution, a society, or a special policy, which is an example of a case. In the case study, the focus should be specific. Therefore, it makes a useful pattern for studies addressing practical problems such as issues encountered in everyday life situations or surprising events (Merriam, 2013). In this study, preschool teachers' and principals' opinions on the current status of the Turkish Education System and problems within this system have been revealed in line with the findings obtained. In this aspect, the research is a descriptive study.

Research participant and data collection

Educators working in preschool education within Turkey are mostly comprised of women. Due to the social and cultural structure, the care and education of infants and young children are predominantly the responsibility of women. This task, attributed to women in everyday life, is reflected in the profession preference of individuals. In other words, men do not prefer to serve in the preschool education stage. Therefore, all the participants are women.

The participants of the study were composed of teachers and principals who work in preschool educational institutions in Alanya, a district of the province Antalya. In the study group, there were 89 female participants that were determined via easy sampling method by taking into consideration the accessibility and volunteerism of the participants. Twenty

of the participants were school principals and principal assistants in preschools, and 69 of the participants were teachers in these same institutions. However, ten of the principals did not answer the first two questions, so they were taken out of the research during the data analysis process. Among the teacher participants, four of them were not at school as they were ill during the data collection process and ten of them did not present any solution recommendations for any kinds of problem they shared. On this basis, 65 of the participants' answers to the research questions were complete. From these participants, 29 of them (44.6%) had served 0-9 years, 26 of them (40.1%) 10-19 years, and 10 of them (15.3%) 20 years or more. All the participants were working in public preschools.

Instrument

A semi-structured interview form was used to collect the data of the study. In the introduction portion of the form, questions related to personal information are given. In the second section, 2 questions are given which have been developed by the researchers within the framework of the data obtained through literature review. The validity of the form was obtained by taking the opinions of three experts from the preschool education department at the university. In addition, in order to provide in-depth data during the interview, participants were asked to explain the issues in detail. Necessary permissions were obtained from Antalya Provincial Directorate of National Education to begin the research process and the interviews were held in January and February 2018. The data were collected by the first author via visiting the participants' who had volunteered to participate in their schools. Interviews were carried out after receiving the consent forms with the signatures of the participants. The interviews took 20 to 25 minutes in the counseling service room which was quiet and available during the process. Recording and note-taking methods were used while the participants were expressing their opinions. The research data was obtained via two open-ended questions. Preschool teachers and principals were asked:

1. What are your opinions on the problems regarding the Turkish education system?

2. What are your suggestions to these problems in the Turkish education system?

While they were expressing their opinions, no restrictions were imposed on the problems they expressed. They were asked to focus on the problem they saw most important to them. During the data collection process, the participants were given the opportunity to think as much as they wanted so that they would not be in a hurry and would be able to organize their thoughts. This process approximately took 10-15 minutes. Then, another 10 minutes is given to express the opinions they organized. Their names were not mentioned during the recording process. In addition, after the recording process, the participants were asked to report their answers on A4 paper without writing their names with the codes they were given; teachers from T1 to T55 and principals from P1 to P10.

Data Analysis

In this study, data was analyzed via content analysis technique. Content analysis is a research method to obtain reproducible, valid-reliable interpretations that help individuals to create new knowledge and insights from data and data related links in order to be able to accurately describe events (Krippendorff, 1980). Through content analysis, the concepts and themes that explain the phenomena discussed in the study and relations between them are reached (Kyngas and Vanhanen 1999). The strength of this technique lies in its solid methodological control and step-by-step analysis of the material (Sandelowski, 1993). The opinions and explanations presented by the participants during the creation of themes are analyzed so that they are related to the research questions and formed into carefully crafted and revised themes. After this stage, inferences are generated based on coding or themes. At the last stage, the results under each theme are supported with secondary data (Patton, 1990). In this direction, firstly, the answers of the participants in the interview forms and recordings were numbered and examined repeatedly. In the meantime, similar expressions were grouped together, and themes were formed. However, opinions have also been placed according to appropriate themes. In addition, frequency values for participants' opinions were also calculated and their opinions regarding each theme were determined for direct quotations to be used in the findings section of the study.

In the analysis phase, the similarity of the findings obtained by the researchers was compared in terms of the reliability of the research. In this respect, it was examined whether or not the views of the participants represented the themes obtained. With the comparison, the adjustment coefficient was calculated and found to be 0.95. This was calculated using the coding reliability of Miles and Huberman (1994) (reliability = consensus/consensus + disagreement x 100). Accordingly, it was observed that the coding compliance reliability was high. In addition, another expert opinion was taken for the same procedure and the coding reliability coefficient was examined and found as 0.89.

The results of the analysis of the interviews were gathered under two different themes as "problems in the Turkish education system" and "solution suggestions". Opinions about the problems in the Turkish education system are asked by: "What are your opinions on the problems regarding the Turkish education system?" The answers given to the question were coded and 4 different sub-themes emerged. These were; Turkish education system, teachers' personal rights, family and other.

Opinions regarding the question, "What are your suggestions to these problems in the Turkish education system?" were gathered under 6 different themes. The answers given to the question were coded, and 6 different sub-themes emerged. These were; solutions to the problems regarding education system, the profession of teaching, teaching-learning process, physical environment, family and other.

In order to ensure the validity of the research expert opinions were asked and direct quotations of the participants were presented (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). In accordance with the ethical rules of the study, the names of the participants were kept secret. While coding of the teachers were from T1 to T55, principals codings were from P1 to P10. The findings include the opinions of the participants with these codes.

FINDINGS

The findings obtained from the data coded in this section are gathered under two different headings: "Problems in the Turkish education system" and "solution suggestions". Findings related to the theme and sub-theme contents created from each title are respectively presented below. The first question of the study, "What are your opinions on the problems regarding the Turkish education system?" was asked to the participants and when their responses were analyzed, it is found that they gathered under 4 themes. They were; *education system, teachers' personal rights, family* and *other*. The information to this finding is given in Table 1.

Table 1.

Themes created based on preschool teachers' and principals' opinions about the general problems in the Turkish Education System

Themes	Opinions	-f-
Education System	23	78
Teachers' Rights	14	40
Family	3	6
Other	3	4
Total	43	

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that there were 23 opinions expressed under the theme of "education system". There were 14 opinions under the theme of "teachers' rights", 3 opinions under the theme of "family" and finally 3 more opinions mentioned under the theme of "other". Accordingly, it is understood that the participants complained the most about the education system and teachers' rights.

Table 2.

Preschool teachers' and principals' opinions regarding the Education System theme

Education System	Opinions	%
Continuously changing education system	17	21,79
The number of students in the classrooms	7	8,97
The quality of education	6	7,69
Lack of opportunity equality in education	5	6,41
Testing and grading system	4	5,13
Uncertainties in the implementation of new approaches	4	5,13
The process not being life-focused	4	5,13
Ignoring students' needs and interests	4	5,13
Limiting teaching to classroom activities and textbooks	3	3,85
Lack of classroom tools and materials	3	3,85
Limited occupational training	3	3,85
Lack of practices	3	3,85
*Decisionmakers notbeing from the field of education**	2	2,56
Appointing everyone as a teacher	2	2,56
Double-shift schooling (early start/late start)	2	2,56
Focusing on the outcome, not on needs and interests	2	2,56
Making education mandatory starting from age 4	1	1,28
Emphasis on teaching values	1	1,28
Encouraging children to compete	1	1,28
Temporary solutions	1	1,28
Insufficient professional guidance	1	1,28
Ignoring lifelong learning	1	1,28
School security system	1	1,28
Total	78	100

The data was collected during Jan. and Feb. of 2018 and the Minister of National Education changed in the summer of 2018, during the writing process of the study.

When Table 2 is examined, the most important issues expressed by the participants under the education system theme were "continuously changing education system", "the number of students in the classrooms" and "the quality of education". In addition, other issues included; "lack of opportunity equality in education", "testing and grading system", "uncertainties in the implementation of new approaches", "the process not being life-focused", "ignoring students' needs and interests", "limiting teaching to classroom activities and textbooks", "lack of classroom tools and materials", "limited occupational training" and "lack of practices". Other problems in the education system were expressed by fewer participants.

In line with the theme of "Education System", some participant opinions were as follows:

P6: *"I would say that the quality of education is low. The first issue we should take care of is that we should not make changes continously because the constant change causes everyone feel insecure."*

P9: *"Teachers have no opportunity to apply the principles of student-centered education as they need to catch up with textbooks and curriculum."*

P10: *"Children should not be treated as if they are racehorses and focus on competing. Also, rote-learning based education doesn't help."*

T9: *"The education system is like a testing lab. To me, the constant change is the main factor that reduces the quality of education."*

T15: *"Dealing with school supplies and bureaucracy, I cannot have time for life-focused activities."*

T24: *"Continuously changing testing systems do not help the quality of the education improve. In the examination system, for example, the TEOG exam (a central exam that elementary school students are subjected to in the transition to secondary school), which was removed suddenly, left students and families in a difficult situation both financially and emotionally. To me, the constantly changing exam system is the main factor that reduces the quality of education."*

T28: *"The solutions that are produced are temporary; everything seems fine from the outside, but when it comes to application it does not look the same."*

T33: *"To be honest I feel the need for a permanent education system. Yes, we all know education changes and develops but every day we go to school, we prepare daily plans, activities, and then all of a sudden we hear or learn via mass media that the curriculum is changed. The information changes—we know that—but it should last longer than a year at least."*

T53: *"Classrooms are not suitable for students' needs. When the classrooms are so crowded, I cannot implement student-centered education. This affects the principles of student-centered education and honestly it becomes hard to apply it in real learning environments."*

Table 3.

Preschool teachers' and principals' opinions regarding Teachers' Rights theme

Teachers' Rights	Opinions	%
Teachers are seen as caregivers	6	15,79
Teacher shortage	5	13,16
Teachers' dignity	5	13,16
Placements, transfers and retirement age	4	10,53
Insufficient amount of salaries	4	10,53
Teachers doing their jobs without love	2	5,26
Working conditions	2	5,26
Home-schooled graduates becoming teachers	2	5,26
Home-schooled graduates becoming principals	1	2,63
Performance evaluations	1	2,63
Mandatory service work pardon	1	2,63
The need of being treated with equity	1	2,63
Teachers teaching in fields they have not been trained in	1	2,63
Paperwork and procedures	1	2,63
Total	36	100

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that the primary subjects expressed by the participants under the "Teachers' Rights" theme that they wanted to express as a problem were: "teachers are seen as caregivers," "teacher shortage" and "teachers' dignity". This topic is followed by "placements, transfers and retirement age". There are also issues regarding "insufficient amount of salaries", "the existence of teachers doing their jobs without love", "working conditions" and "home-schooled graduates becoming teachers and principals". In addition, there are the following categories: "performance evaluations", "mandatory service work pardon", "the need of being treated with equity", "teachers teaching in fields they have not been trained in" and "paperwork and procedures".

In line with the theme of "Teachers' Rights", some participant opinions were as follows:

P3: *"I wish the working conditions could be improved. Teachers' working hours are arranged according to parents' working hours as they are seemingly hired to watch their kids while they are away. Teachers are there to educate—not babysit children—so this should be clear."*

P7: *"Home-schooled graduates should not be appointed as teachers or principals."*

T1: *"The reputation of the teaching profession should be re-established. We should be valued by society for creating educated members. The success of our teachers creates the success of all."*

T5: *"Our salaries always remain nearly the same amount every year, nothing goes up really. When the prices for everything are increasing non-stop, the salary increase is 10% and the increase in primary needs is almost 100%, so stationary salaries is really an issue. I do not want to look at the*

right side of the menu when I go to a restaurant. I want to look on the left side and focus on choosing what I want, not what I can afford."

T42: *"When we are overloaded with long teaching hours and procedures, we cannot create quality education. When course hours, checking the assignments given, preparing the exams, sitting the exams and then grading them, following student attendance, the need for teachers to update themselves through constant studying, as well as the time that the teacher should have for their own family are all considered, it is really stressful and tiring to think about how little time they can have for themselves to recharge their energy for the next day. Teachers unfortunately have no time for their own family because of the endless preparations and work."*

T17: *"I'd say that we cannot do our job because of paperwork and procedures. It should be a process that gives pleasure to teachers and students. It is a pity to make this process unbearable with paperwork for both."*

Table 4.

Preschool teachers' and principals' opinions regarding Family theme

Family	Opinions	%
Neglectful and insensitive parents	3	50,0
Parents' unawareness of what to expect from teachers	2	33,0
Helicopter parenting	1	17,0
Total	6	100

When Table 4 is examined, it is observed that the participants expressed 3 opinions under the "Family" theme. In this regard, "neglectful and insensitive parents", "parents' unawareness of what to expect from teachers" and "helicopter parenting" were the issues they stated.

In line with the theme of "Family", some participant opinions were as follows:

P1: *"Parents' education is the most important part of the education system. It is so essential to have them understand we need their support to provide a better education for their children. Some are neglectful and some are involved to a fault that we use the term helicopter parenting."*

P4: *"Parents don't support their children's education. Educated parents have no time for their children while uneducated parents have little knowledge to pass on. Knowledge-learning should be valued more by all members of society."*

T36: *"Parents are busy with their own work but they need to participate in educating their children. I know that they work hard—because I am a working mom too. There should be a way to win them over so that the learning can be transferred to real life situations and become permanent."*

T50: *"First of all, parents need education—not their children. The problem is bigger than we predicted, and the worst is that the majority of families do not accept it when there is a problem arising from themselves."*

Table 5.

Preschool teachers' and principals' opinions regarding the theme of Other

Other	Opinions	%
Feeling exhausted, unhappy and desperate	2	50
Insensitivity of the top authorities	1	25
Students' individual differences are eliminated	1	25
Total	4	100

When Table 5 is examined, it is observed that the participants expressed 4 opinions under the theme of 'Other'. According to this, "feeling exhausted, unhappy and desperate", "insensitivity of the top authorities" and "students' individual differences are eliminated" were the problems they expressed.

In line with the theme of "Other", some participant opinions were as follows:

T11: *"I'd say that I am tired, unhappy and desperate. My life is spent between home and school. I have no time or energy for creatively forming my class lessons, and it shows."*

T44: *"I would like to say that the education system is harming our children's psychology via compulsory conformity—as we take different individuals with different characteristics and in the end educating them with same features. This deadens them to the excitement of life-long learning."*

Findings regarding preschool teachers' and principals' solution suggestions to the problems in the Education System:

In line with the second sub-goal of the study, the following question was asked: "What are your suggestions to these problems in the Turkish education system?" When the answers to this question were analyzed, the opinions were gathered under 6 themes; *education system, the profession of teaching, teaching-learning process, physical environment, family* and *other*.

When research findings are examined, it is observed that the participants expressed several solution suggestions under the theme of education system. The suggestions are as follows:

- Quality in education should be improved.

- Education system should not be changed constantly.

- The program should be updated for all levels.

- Double-schedule education (early start/late start) should end.

- *The Minister of Education should be someone who knows the teaching-learning process and understands the psychology of both students and teachers.**

- Education should be organized according to students' needs.

- Student and learning-centered education should be applied.

- Pupils should be guided from a young age regarding their individual skills.

• Interpersonal, critical and life skills should be applied at all levels of education.

• The exam system should not change constantly and shouldn't be the focus of education.

• More emphasis on foreign language education is needed.

• Elementary school should not start before age seven.

• Students, parents and teachers shouldn't be loaded with more responsibilities than they can handle.

Before the present study was completed, the Minister in charge had resigned (July 2018) and Prof. Dr. Ziya Selçuk was assigned right after, who is appreciated widely as his lifetime work was spent in the field of Education.

In line with the theme of "Education System", some participant opinions were as follows:

P4: *"Radical changes that are permanent should be done, such as appointing a new Minister of Education who comes from the field of education, with the experience of teaching and everything related to it."*

P8: *"Academicians should be in the Ministry of Education in order to bring permanent and qualified solutions to the problems and ideas of the experts should be taken while forming the curriculum, making radical changes or determining the lawful procedures."*

T3: *"The government should raise the awareness of teachers, principals, parents and students about the issue that students are not competitive racehorses. Why have winners and losers? All children should be taught and valued for their efforts, so they can have self-confidence and self-worth that carries forth into their lives. Additionally, we should give importance to interpersonal, critical and life skills because these are more functional than theoretical knowledge."*

T8: *"Elementary school should start at the age of seven. Children should not be sent to kindergarten before the age of 4. Their minds and bodies must reach critical milestones to be learning-ready. Teachers working in preschool institutions are not babysitters. Moreover, we all need to accept that rote-learning based education fails."*

T19: *"Changes in the system must be planned and programmed and should be carried out within the knowledge of the citizens. The purpose of education should be raising children who are well-behaved, respectful, conscientious and patriotic. Students should be placed according to their skills, not their scores, or both should be taken into consideration fairly."*

When the theme of *Teaching Profession* is examined, it is observed that the participants have different opinions expressed under the theme of "problems in the teaching profession". The two main solutions that are recommended under this theme were: "the reduction of retirement age" and "increasing salaries reasonably". In addition, the participants mentioned issues about; "enriching workshops and seminars that are obligatory", "rejuvenating teaching staff via new assignments" and "not assigning anyone

in a branch they have no training in". Besides, a small number of the participants expressed suggestions about; "preparations regarding lessons, tests and homework should be taken into consideration while determining the working hours" and "there must be at least one teaching assistant at the preschool level". "Restoring the reputation of the teaching profession and preserving the teachers' rights both materially and ethically", "using realistic methods and techniques to increase teacher proficiency" and "supporting experience abroad more" were also among the solutions they recommended.

In line with the theme of "Teaching Profession", some participant opinions were as follows:

P2: *"The retirement age should be reduced, and new energetic young teachers should be appointed. Children relate more with younger or more energetic teachers who bring excitement and engagement to their classes."*

P5: *"Realistic methods and techniques should be used to increase teacher proficiency. Teachers' schedules should have enough time for skills development in these areas."*

T7: *"Teachers' dignity need to be regained. We are highly trained teaching professionals. Parents and administrators have lost touch with our value—to mold children into educated and positively participating people in society."*

When the theme of *Teaching-learning Process* is examined, it is observed that the participants suggested solutions such as; "including new approaches in the applications" and "adopting life-focused learning". "Educating students through more outdoor activities", *"lengthening recess time**"*, "encouraging emotional intelligence and imagination", "processing 14roje plans", "applying multiple intelligence in teaching", "exploring and supporting pupils' abilities" and "teaching and improving life skills" were also among the solution suggestions they recommended.

*** With the new education term of 2019 in Fall, the recess time was increased from 10 minutes to 15 min. Moreover, considering 2023 Vision (MEB, 2019) there is a 14roject starting in Antalya named "40 minutes teaching- 40 minutes recess" that will be applied in 14 elementary and secondary schools.*

In line with the theme of "Teaching-Learning Process", some participant opinions were as follows:

P1: *"New teaching approaches including considerations for multiple intelligence should be applied in schools. Children do not all learn in the same way, and as scientists of education, we should be accommodating these differences so that each child can learn to their potential."*

T4: *"Education should not take place only in classrooms. Outdoor activities such as movies, theatre and discovery centers should be included too. Hands-on learning through experiences work best and are the most lasting."*

T25: *"It is necessary to design a high-quality program that is entertaining. They are seriously lacking in life skills and in the arts. Rote-teaching and presentation of topics are failing our students. We raise kids that cannot play a single instrument or draw a single image from their imagination. Foreign language and sports skills are also as essential as art skills, as they will be boosting and protecting*

their uniqueness. Because every child will be exploring and expressing it in their own way."

When the theme of *Physical Environment* is examined, it is observed that the most highlighted recommendation was "the number of the pupils in the classes should be reduced". In addition, participants recommended; "increasing the funds", "to boost creativity and enthusiasm, classes and activity areas should be more productive", "directing students to outdoor activities" and "while forming class size, age should be taken into consideration", "the number of materials and schools should be enriched" and "resources should be updated" as solutions to the problems they have mentioned previously. Although there were not many participants recommending "the security equipment and personnel should be improved" and "schools should be surrounded by trees and natural areas for mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being" there were a few thinking that it was essential to add these topics on the agenda.

In line with the theme of "Physical Environment", some participant opinions were as follows:

P6: *"The classrooms are very crowded. There are still preschool classes with 25 three-year-olds, elementary classes with thirty pupils and secondary schools with thirty-eight. This makes it nearly impossible for the teacher to track individual students' learning, nonetheless manage the classroom and keep order among the students."*

T12: *"Making school environment greener for students in order to foster mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being. Natural environments calm and balance all of us, and reduce anxieties which may have built up during the school-day."*

When the theme of *Family* is examined, it is observed that the most highlighted recommendation was "educating parents to raise their awareness". In addition, participants suggested "the family institution should be strengthened" and "orientation programs for parents are necessary". Though the suggestion regarding *"Alo 147 (complaint line) should stop***"* was suggested by only one participant, the first action of the new Minister of Education was removing this complaint line (which was being abused).

In line with the theme of "Family", some participant opinions were as follows:

P10: *"There are so many troubled families. Supportive mechanisms should be created, and the family institution should be strengthened. As families support their members, they become more engaged in their children's education. Children in troubled family situations cannot properly give their attention to learn at school."*

T31: *"Alo 147 complaint line should not be given as a weapon for parents to use and should stop immediately. It was an unwelcome practice by teachers in Turkey as it was misused by some parents."*

T39: *"Family education is important. Seminars should be given regularly in order to ensure parents' consciousness. Putting a positive focus on education, and adults who value education, shows the children that learning is something that everyone does."*

****The new National Education Minister, Prof. Dr. Ziya Selçuk's first action was to remove the complaint line, as it was being abused.*

Finally, when the theme of *Other* is examined, it is observed that the most highlighted recommendation was "improving cooperation between educational institutions". This opinion was followed by "preventing unhealthy social media effects/use via cultural education", "readdressing electronics as the most prevalent addiction of people at large" and "taking opinions of experts in education into consideration more while forming the curriculum". Some participants suggested "removing survey applications or using them properly for the purpose of improvement", "involving teachers both in local and national projects more", "reviewing teaching of values" and "increasing events to strengthen national awareness".

In line with the theme of "Other", some participant opinions were as follows:

P8: *"Opinions of experts in education should be taken into consideration more while forming educational matters. Academics should take part in the Ministry of National Education and especially permanent and qualified solutions should be developed."*

T41: *"People from the youngest to the oldest are on electronics in one way or another so electronics need to be readdressed as the most prevalent addiction of people at large."*

T48: *"Social media is invading the minds of our youth so we should prevent unhealthy social media effect/use via cultural education as soon as we can. We need to provide training as a society so that we all can recognize and avoid the pitfalls of electronics-mediated socialization."*

T55: *"Survey applications are being abused as a way of threatening teachers so they should be serving according to its purpose or just removed."*

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The present study was carried out to examine preschool teachers' and principals' opinions on the Turkish education system. According to their opinions, four themes were formed "education system," "teachers' rights", "family" and other". Preschool teachers' and principals' answers to the questions: "What are preschool teachers' and principals' opinions on the problems of the Turkish education system? and "What are preschool teachers' and principals' solution suggestions to the problems of the Turkish education system?" were categorically examined via qualitative research method. When the findings are examined in line with the sub-goals of the present research, it can be said that the participants' ideas were focused within certain categories and the results obtained in this study overlap the findings of many other studies conducted on similar topics (Kartal, 2013; Kösterelioğlu & Bayar, 2014; Pınar, 2016; Şener, 2018; Taşdemir, 2015; Uygun, 2013; Yeşil & Şahan, 2015; Yılmaz & Altınkurt, 2011). The studies pointed out issues such as; teacher inefficiency/teacher qualifications, exam-oriented education, rote-based education, the absence of enriched activities, the excess of older/non-retired teachers, various infrastructure problems, teacher assignment problems, teachers not working in their own branches, families not being educated or informed, the physical environment not being enriching, crowded classrooms,

current paradigm regarding the education system is being found insufficient, and pre-service teachers not being aware of the changes in the education system.

In the present study, in regard to the education system theme, the participants expressed the following topics as problems to be solved; a continuously changing education system, the high number of students in the classrooms, the low quality of education, lack of opportunity equality in education, testing and grading systems, uncertainties in the implementation of new approaches, the process not being life-focused, ignoring students' needs and interests, teaching being limited to classroom activities and textbooks, lack of classroom tools and materials, limited occupational training, lack of practices, decision-makers not being from the field of education, appointing anyone as a teacher, double-schedule schooling (early start/late start) and education system focusing on a homogenous outcome instead of individual needs and interests. Most of these issues are also mentioned in the study of Norton (1997).

Some of the solutions suggested to solve these problems included; improving the quality of education, not changing teaching protocols constantly (for instance, the exams), removing double-schedule education (early start/late start), paying attention to students' needs while organizing the environment and materials, appointing a Minister of Education that knows the teaching-learning process and understands the psychology of both students and teachers, and putting more emphasis on foreign language education. Here it can be said that participants voiced their desires to increase the quality in a more sense by taking the instruction size of the education system to the center of focus, and for this, they actually suggested more solutions than specific ones. Indeed, these solutions are often expressed by the educational community at large. However, considering that the education field is a vast system, it is best to assess the effects of a small change from a larger perspective. For this, a solution that was expressed by one of the participants is noteworthy as they emphasized the importance of having a competent minister possessing the following qualifications: years of experience in the teaching field which make them an expert in implementing educational programs, familiarity with the daily school environment, curriculum, and learning sciences, and who knows what is missing in the current system and has a in-depth grasp about current changes and implementations. Thankfully, this fundamental change has happened during the data analysis process of the present research. This further validates the importance of such steps. Surprisingly, this is only the third time since 1923 that a minister who is coming from the field of education has been appointed (MEB, 2019). The two previous ministers who had previous experience in the field of education served between the years of 1938-1946, and then not again until 1989-1991. The other ministers who were appointed over the years came from such fields as politics, law and business. The current Minister of National Education and his team were appointed in July 2018 and they have rapidly been working to revise the Turkish Education System. They outlined strategic plans for implementing changes to the education system and shared this with the public under the name of 2023 Vision (MNE, 2019). Today, all types of stakeholders in education are

appreciating these innovations, and they are more optimistic about the future of education in Turkey. Therefore, it is possible to see the participants' concerns and recommendations stated in this study are being addressed in the political decisions prepared by the new Ministry of National Education cabinet, both in short and long-term planning.

Another conclusion reached in the study was found in regard to the teachers' rights. In this context, the participants expressed the following topics as issues: teachers are seen as caregivers, the teacher shortage, teachers' dignity, placements, transfers and retirement age, insufficient amount of salaries, the existence of teachers doing their jobs without love, working conditions, home-schooled graduates (with low social/collaborative experience) becoming teachers/principals, performance evaluations, mandatory service work pardon, the need of being treated with equity, the teachers teaching in fields they have not been trained in, and the paperwork/procedures being excessive. Sağ, Savaş and Sezer (2009) conducted their study in Burdur with 38 teachers and found that the problems that teachers encounter center on the topics of school administration, instructional programs, instruction, assessment, and socio-economic environment. Yalçın and Yalçın (2018) conducted their study on preschool education and its problems, and teachers expressed problems such as class size, activities such as drama and play were not effectively being performed, parents' perceptions of preschool education as unnecessary—considering it just as a place where children spent time. Insufficient teachers' rights affect their performance in the teaching process, which directly affects the education system adversely (Özdoğan Özbal & Gökçe, 2018). Therefore, it is thought to be a very promising development that the new government urgently intends to legislate the "Teaching Profession Law" to address teachers' rights.

The solution suggestions recommended under the theme of physical environment were mentioned as; the number of the pupils in the classes should be reduced, funds for educational institutions should be increased, classes and activity areas should be more productive to boost creativity and enthusiasm, students' should also be directed to outdoor activities, class size should be formed by age groups (especially at the preschool level), the number of materials and schools should be enriched, resources should be updated, the security equipment and personnel should be improved. Crowded classes needs tremendous effort as there is always something to be done. It might be difficult to get a satisfactory knowledge of pupils' needs. Intimacy with them and remembering names might be difficult. Besides, the noise level can be high and that might cause stress for the teacher. Organizing, planning and presenting lessons, may constitute another challenge for teachers as students abilities might differ considerably. Both engaging learners actively in the learning process and making use of school resources such as computers and books might also be a challenge. When it comes to evaluation, it might also be difficult to measure effectiveness. gives reluctant students a place to hide (Rhalmi, 2016). In brief, crowded classes causes poor-quality instruction, disciplinary distractions and lower test scores (Pearson, 2017). Another striking recommendation was the necessity of schools being surrounded by trees and natural areas for mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being. Children's schools,

as we see, are built one after another like an industrial zone, with no greenery and life to them. Learning environments should be green-based, as we are growing children. Green spaces boost cognitive development, as well as physical and mental health (Dadvand et al., 2015).

The other outcome of the study includes issues related to "Family" and its solutions. In this context, the problems that are expressed most often are that parents are either being neglectful and insensitive, being unaware of what to expect from teachers, or they are "helicopter parenting". Essentially, the main source of this problem is the changes in the perspective of the community towards teachers (Yalçın & Yalçın, 2018). Since ancient times, teachers have been the most respected, valued and reputable people of both religious and traditional backgrounds in every age of Turkish history. Teachers' perceptions of parents and parent involvement, shaped by culture, history and school practices (Lazar & Slostad, 2010). However, tendencies of society are passed to students from parents, and there is also an increase in the frequency of students rising up against their teachers. This naturally raises disciplinary problems and reveals the importance of valuing education. It is a fact that when Turkey is compared to other countries in the world in terms of current moral structure and values towards elder people, it is definitely in a better condition. However, since the Turkish community is a very socially connected society with its traditions and customs, the approaches of parents and the new generation are especially alarming. It is also important to raise awareness so that parents will stop "helicopter parenting" and start trusting and respecting teachers. Parenting education, strengthening the family institution and preparing orientation programs are all stated as necessary to raise awareness. Moreover, one of the participants suggested that Alo 147 (complaint line) should be discontinued, which parents were using vindictively as a means to complain aggressively about teachers and practices. As it was being abused by both parents and students (who were mostly high school students) the first action of Prof. Dr. Ziya Selçuk as the Minister of Education was to end this complaint line.

The last result achieved in the research consists of a number of problems and solutions under the theme of "Other". In this respect, participants expressed suggestions such as "improving cooperation between educational institutions", "preventing unhealthy social media effects/use via cultural education", "electronics need to be addressed as the most prevalent addiction of people at large" and "opinions of experts in education should be taken into consideration while forming educational matters" as the most noticeable solution suggestions. The solution suggestion expressed by one participant as "emphasis on teaching values" may be considered a justified suggestion. As the recent science education is lacking in providing sufficient inner orientation and bases for students' unfolding and accomplishment of inner moral values and ideals which are essential for their development (Corrigan et al., 2007). Different groups of teachers understand and interpret the issue of quality in education in different ways, but they all converge on the same key words. The problems raised under this topic are: how to educate the new generation about life in a

community; how to help them learn what freedom, rights, participation, respect for others and societal contracts mean; explain why and how democracy works; and teaching effective communication. These are values to be obtained for the good of society, but also act as a strategy for implementing the process of education (Hafizi & Papa, 2012). However, effective communication has become something difficult to build among people because of social media cheapening and lessening real connection with others. Preventing unhealthy usage of social media is essential. It causes social isolation, loneliness, and depression. Some studies have linked it to envy, lower self-esteem and social anxiety, so its usage should be limited in terms of when and where it is used (Kecmanovic, 2019 Additionally, electronics, while making our lives easier in many ways, have led to a growing epidemic of chronically spending time in front of screens. They have become less of just a helpful tool and more of a controlling feature in the lives of youth, leading to wide-spread addiction and behavioral issues (Benson, 2019).

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data of the present data is limited due to the features of the qualitative method in which the aim is to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and its reasons. Because of its complex application and lack of justification with statistical methods, the data collection process always gives some kind of confusion and challenges, especially reliability and validity issues, data measurement and generalization of findings (Islam & Faruque, 2016). It is recommended that the continuity of such work should be ensured via exploring quantitative and mixed methods. Another limitation of the study is the sample group. The participants of the present study were preschool teachers and principals. Studies including all the stakeholders' opinions about the Turkish education system can be additionally conducted.

With this research, it is hoped that the voice of teachers and principals in the preschool stage of Turkish education can be heard as they are aware not only about the problems of preschool education but also the Turkish education system as they are well-trained experts in their field. In addition, all authorities who will be solving these problems can benefit from the present research so the study may contribute with valuable suggestions.

CONCLUSION

The problems observed in the Turkish Education System are undoubtedly common problems shared by many developed and developing countries. When the results of the present research are generally evaluated, according to the opinions of the preschool teachers and principals, there are many problems within the Turkish education system and there is a lot of work to be done to improve it. Determining these problems is indeed key to a better and more meaningful education. Focusing on expert opinions is essential to inform

diagnosis and improve the process of learning and teaching. As researchers, we also know that educational problems are universal, and even developed countries strive to improve their systems as they are suffering from similar issues such as the quality of education, class size, excessive testing and low salaries of teachers. These problems can only be solved by paying attention to what all these studies are discussing and handling each problem one by one. Keeping the number of the students in the classrooms small, lessening the number of tests while increasing their quality, giving teachers what they really deserve both publicly and financially in terms of prestige and salary are not difficult to fulfill. It is thought that the proposals of the participants cannot be implemented within a short time. However, we hope and believe that delivering quality education is possible.

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