Preschool teachers’ expectations and evaluations on the effects of in-service teacher education in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

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Abstract

Teachers need certain teaching skills in order to teach effectively. In-service teaching courses are important for teachers as they provide teachers with a sense of profession and experience as well as the joy and challenges of teaching. In-service teacher education courses were carried out with preschool teachers working in public preschools in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

The purpose of this study was to examine in-service teachers’ expectations from in-service teaching courses and their evaluations regarding the effects of the courses on teachers’ profession. The in-service courses comprised such topics as intuitive thinking in preschool children, creativity, development of mathematical thinking, functions of educational routines in preschool classes, enhancement of developmental areas with educational activity in preschool, child assessment and evaluation methods in preschool.

The sample consisted of 178 preschool teachers working in public preschools in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. In this study, qualitative method was used. The data were collected through participants’ responses about their expectations and assessments to open-ended questions asked by researchers during the courses. A categorical analysis was employed for the qualitative data.

The results of the study show that the highest expectation of preschool teachers is to gain new scientific knowledge about their profession. The other expectation is gaining specific information about subjects such as learning disorders, conflict resolution in the classroom and management of child behavior problems. Teachers specified that they achieved different perspectives about their profession at the end of the courses. In addition they desire to these kind of courses regularly during the academic year.

Keywords: Preschool teachers; preschool education; in-service teaching.

1. Introduction

The concepts of lifelong development and learning, which are widely acclaimed today, emphasize the need for individuals to enhance and continue educational activities throughout life. Education assumes the function of facilitating adaptation to changing conditions of the society by making individuals acquire new knowledge and...
skills. Accordingly, in-service trainings, as a requirement of lifelong learning, aim to make individuals adapt to information society as well as to changing and developing technologies by enhancing their professional knowledge and developing their professional skills.

In teaching profession, as it is the case for each profession, individuals need to refresh their professional knowledge, update information and ensure dynamic professional development through in-service training programs after they graduate from the university. As preschool period is of critical importance in development, the education children receive during this period has the power of affecting the following stages of life and hence the future of communities. That is why teachers who teach preschool children should be equipped with diverse skills and knowledge. The studies concerning the quality of preschool teachers conducted in the last decade show that teachers holding a four-year undergraduate degree provide an education of higher-quality compared to the ones holding a lower degree, given the educational gains of children (Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford, & Howes, 2002). It is argued that the behavioral orientation of teachers who received better and longer education is more sensitive and more positive (Howes, 1997). Furthermore, it is found out that children who are trained by teachers with a higher degree acquire higher developmental gains (Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, Burchinal, O’Brien, & McCartney, 2002, Howes, Whitebook, & Phillips, 1992; Weaver, 2002). The contribution of teachers’ educational level to the quality of preschool education clearly demonstrates that teachers are required to perpetuate their professional development through in-service training. In-service opportunities and support provided to teachers ensure them to use their professional skills more effectively in the educational environment (Whitebook, GombyDan, Bellm, Sakai and Kipnis, 2009).

In the literature, the studies concerning in-service training of preschool teachers concentrate on diverse variables. However, their common finding is that the interaction of pre-service and in-service training processes is required in teacher education.

Uşun and Cömert (2003) studied the needs of preschool teachers regarding in-service training. The study showed that teachers with an experience of 16 to 20 years participated in previous in-service trainings more than the teachers in the other groups did. The first three in-service training programs in which teachers wish to participate were Mental Health of Children, Creative Activities and Plans Used in Preschool Education Institutions. The researchers found out a significant correlation between their preference for participation in “Mental Health of Children” and participation in an in-service training previously. Temel et al. (1999) revealed that teachers mostly required in-service training about planning and implementation of dynamic activities, planning and implementation of science- and nature-related activities, implementation of a new nursery school curriculum, activities with impaired children, and new approaches and technologies in preschool education.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the expectations of preschool teachers from in-service training and their evaluations following in-service trainings. The teachers in the sample are employed in nursery schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

2. Method

Descriptive method was used in this study. With the cooperation of the Primary Education Department and Common Educational Services Department within the Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Cyprus International University, an in-service training seminar was carried out, where 178 teachers in public nursery schools participated. The content of education was the use of books selected for the academic year 2009 – 2010 in the educational environment, intuitive thinking skills of children, creativity, development of mathematical thinking, evaluation of preschool curriculum with regard to educational routines in the classroom, supporting learners’ school, development and experience areas through educational activities, and recognizing and evaluating children. Before and after the training seminars, teachers were asked to express their expectations from the training, and after the seminars, they were asked to communicate their evaluation about the training in written form. Content analysis was used to evaluate the opinions of the participants.
3. Results (Findings)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring new and different knowledge</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring knowledge about a specific topic in the field</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring knowledge about in-class practices</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring knowledge about how to use books</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being better motivated for the new semester, interacting with colleagues</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>192</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 1, the highest expectation of the teachers from seminars is acquiring new and different knowledge. This category involves such replies as “acquiring new modern knowledge about my field of profession”, “refreshing and enhancing the knowledge I already have”, “develop myself in the areas where I feel incompetent”, “acquiring new points of view” and “learning new methods and techniques”. The teachers’ second expectation is acquiring knowledge about a specific topic in the field. The topics coded in this category are “helping children with learning difficulty”, “emotional-behavioral problems of children”, “school adaptation problems”, “classroom management”, “mathematical games”, “attention training”, “in-class communication” and so on. The third expectation is acquiring knowledge about in-class practices. Within this category there are expectations concerning “instructional tool design”, “drama” and “art activity”. This expectation is followed by acquiring knowledge about how to use books. Finally, 5% of the teachers stated that they expect to start the semester with higher motivation and to meet and interact with their colleagues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I acquired new knowledge, it was useful</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need additional information about implementation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It did not meet my expectations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training setting was not favorable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>74</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 2, the category which received the highest score involves such replies as “our expectations were met”, “the information and method was completely suitable for us”, “we gained new knowledge” and “the seminars were useful”. Teachers mentioned that they need information about specific topics in addition to the aforementioned gains. Only two teachers had negative statements, one saying that the seminars did not meet expectations and the other stating that the setting was not favorable. During the seminars, the teachers generally mentioned that such seminars should be repeated more frequently and periodically.

4. Discussion

The 21st century is the age of information, in other words, the age of generating and using information. The world needs individuals who not only are equipped with knowledge but also produce and know how to access knowledge. People of the 21st century desire a cleaner environment and a more livable world. The purpose of education is not to fill the brains of individuals with unlimited information most of which they will not use, but to develop their thinking structures and to activate the power of thinking, and thus educational activities should be planned in view of this purpose. What is important is to make individuals acquire basic concepts and to activate thinking, so that they can create and add new knowledge on previous learning through new interactions and experiences. In this way, learning becomes permanent. The individuals whose thinking structure develops can create more positive societies
in the future and adopt democracy more tightly. The motto “education is for production” emphasizes the importance of real-life implications of education. That is why education should be planned in a way to ensure lifelong learning. In this globalization process, where human quality is of specific importance, the current education system of our country fails to train students who can keep pace with the changes in the world and thus needs to be restructured and reorganized.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The new responsibility of schools is to raise students who grasped the dynamics of change and are able to adapt to new situations and even has the capacity to leadership of changes. In the restructuring process of the Turkish Cypriot education system, the professional characteristics of teachers are defined as follows: creating learning settings suitable for students’ interest and talents, establishing the interaction between as student and his/her environment, having good communication with students’ families and school administration, adopting horizontal communication, employing instructional techniques in a student-centered manner, being fond of their profession and adopting it as a life style, following continuously profession-related developments, having a good command of computer technology, developing themselves and students continuously, using effectively and efficiently such methods as drama, plays, discovery, irony, debate, research, performance, excursion, observation, investigation, experimentation, question-and-answer and so on, internalizing contemporary reforms of Atatürk and striving to implement them, giving importance to the correct use of the Turkish language and contributing to the development of the Turkish Cypriot culture (Çağlar ve Reis, 2007). Future scientific and academic research should aim to achieve these goals.

In-service trainings allow teachers to acquire new knowledge and skills in their field of profession, and to take advantage from new educational technologies in education settings. Saracho and Spodek (2003) studied teachers’ need for knowledge and found that preschool teachers require knowledge and skills they can use both in pre-service and in-service processes. They mentioned that the teachers who participated in trainings mainly need information about child development, education science, learning and teaching styles and development of creativity.

References


