

Early childhood pre-service teachers' concerns and solutions to overcome them (the case of Pamukkale University)

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The purpose of this qualitative study is to determine early childhood pre-service teachers' concerns and solutions. One hundred early childhood pre-service teachers who were enrolled at Pamukkale University, Turkey, answered two open-ended questions by e-mail. In addition, six of these participants were interviewed for developing a deeper understanding of their concerns and solutions. Five main areas of concerns and solutions were identified as: (1) children, (2) parents, (3) school principals and colleagues, (4) environmental conditions, (5) self-orientation. This paper draws attention to the underlying reasons given by pre-service teachers about their concerns and elicits their ways of overcoming these concerns, in order to identify pre-service teachers' needs, in becoming effective teachers, and to integrate possible areas of concern in management and development of teacher education.

Keywords: concerns; early childhood education; pre-service teachers; teacher education

Introduction

Pre-service teachers bring the images of teachership and ready metaphors defining teaching to teacher training. They also bring their personal beliefs and values about the ethical purpose of teaching and the role of the teacher in the relationship with students. While their knowledge, experiences, and skills increase, they develop the understanding of what a "real" teacher is by taking part in the practicum (Pietsch & Williamson, 2005:364). Within this period, teacher educators can support the professional development of pre-service teachers by understanding their concerns and addressing them. Hence, pre-service teachers will be more equipped and ready for the practices during their teaching professions. However, pre-service teachers can suffer from anxiety and stress because of their concerns related to teaching and consequently they can withdraw themselves from a teacher training program (Chan, 2002).

Fuller, Parsons and Watkins (1974) stated that the concerns about teaching are expressions of the requirement for becoming motivated for related learning. They added that teacher educators should consider motivating student teachers for coping with these concerns. Fuller (1969) emphasized the importance of pre-service teachers' concerns and how they change during the teacher preparation process. She investigated pre-service teachers' concerns in four stages as pre-teaching concern, concerns about self-survival, concerns about teaching situation, and concerns about pupils. Two quantitative instruments were developed based on Fuller's concern-based model, namely, the Teacher Concerns Questionnaire (George, 1978) and the Teacher Concerns Check-

list (Fuller & Borich, 1988 cited in Smith & Sanche, 1993). In the literature, there are remarkable studies which examine Fuller's model by using these instruments (e.g. Reeves & Kazelskis, 1985; Clyde & Ebbeck, 1991; Smith & Sanche, 1993). In a Turkish study conducted by Alisinanoğlu, Kesicioğlu and Ünal (2010), Teacher Concerns Questionnaire was administered to determine early childhood pre-service teachers' concerns. Their study showed students' concern level decreases the longer they are in the teacher education program and it determined that gender is not an important factor.

Since researchers of teacher concerns agree that unless these concerns are determined and solved, they can decrease pre-service teachers' confidence and prevent them from improving their learning to teach (Chan, 2002). Because better programme quality depends on better-educated teachers, pre-service teachers' concerns about their occupation need to be defined and solved to increase their confidence and competence, further enhancing teachers quality as they enter the profession (Saracho & Spodek, 2007). In addition, determining concerns and proposal solutions of early childhood teachers who are ready to start their profession is required, in terms of reorganization of pre-service and in-service training programmes to support their motivation to become better teachers.

Accordingly, this study is intended to be helpful to early childhood teacher educators for modifying and improving teacher education programmes thereby getting pre-service teachers to produce various solutions to overcome possible problems with which they are concerned and helping them become more self-confident and better qualified teachers.

Research methodology

Qualitative research methods were used in order to examine pre-service early childhood teachers' concerns about their profession and solutions for these concerns. All of the fourth grade students enrolled for the early childhood teacher education programme at Pamukkale University in Denizli, Turkey, received an e-mail. A total of 100 pre-service teachers responded to the e-mails, yielding a response rate of 63.2%. These participants were predominantly female (94%); their average age was 23 years.

The introductory part of the e-mail included an explanation of the aim of the research and a privacy statement indicating the confidential use of participants' information in the research to reassure them about answering the e-mail. In addition, respondents were encouraged to answer questions as detailed as possible in their own time (Gibson, 2010). A question form including the questions: "*What are the subjects that make you most concerned when you see yourself as a teacher?*" and "*What are the solutions – if you have – about any subjects?*" were applied in addition to another two questions about their ages and gender. Responses were analysed through content analysis techniques appropriate for identifying the subjects/areas which are concerns of the participants (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Within this process, categories and sub-

categories emerged. The frequencies of coded phrases for each category were calculated.

Then, three participants who expressed the most and three participants who expressed the least concerns were identified for the purpose of obtaining more in-depth information about their concerns and solutions. All of these six participants were females and their average age was 23. These participants were sent an e-mail asking them whether they would volunteer for individual interviews regarding their previous e-mails. The participants were informed that the proposed interviews were based on voluntariness and their privacy would be guaranteed. All of these participants agreed to meet. After that, face-to-face interviews were carried out with each of them. Semi-structured interviews started with warm-up discussions and then pre-service teachers were asked to express their concerns about their professions. They expressed why these concerns occurred and what their perceptions were about their level of concerns. Moreover, they shared their opinions about the solutions for each of the concerns, why they thought about these solutions, and how useful these solutions could be. Interviews were recorded with their permission and lasted about 45 minutes each.

Results and discussion

After data analysis of the e-mail responses, five categories emerged: Concerns about children and solutions; Concerns about parents and solutions; Concerns about school principals and colleagues and solutions; Concerns about environmental conditions and solutions; Self-oriented concerns and solutions. The length of responses of the first question about concerns ranged from 29 to 92 words while the length of responses of the second question about solutions ranged from 13 to 283 words. While 73 of the respondents offered at least one solution to each concern that they expressed; four of the respondents mentioned that they had not any proposed solutions regarding their concerns; 21 of the respondents offered solutions to some of their concerns.

Data from e-mails are presented as tables that show the concerns and the solutions of each emergent category. Additionally, impressive/interesting expressions from face-to-face interviews are presented after the tables and then discussed according to the relevant categories. Participants who were interviewed were named P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6.

Concerns about children and solutions

The category, concerns about children and solutions, included sub-categories of classroom management (frequency: $f=37$), communication with children ($f=34$), children with special needs and inclusion ($f=19$).

Participants' solution proposals of classroom management concentrated on organizing classroom rules with children ($f=8$), consulting books ($f=7$) and experienced colleagues ($f=7$), and organizing interesting activities ($f=5$). There were also participants who expressed that they could produce solutions by conducting research about this concern and cooperating with parents.

P2 expressed the following about this concern:

“I do not think I will be able to reach my goals unless I provide classroom management. I do not want to be a kind of teacher who is trying to do some things by shouting at children. However I am not sure about where to start. Also I am concerned if I cannot solve the problems among children.”

Phelps (1991) stated that one of the biggest challenges of novice teachers in the profession is classroom management. If teachers are not successful in this aspect of teaching, they can also be unsuccessful in their educational efforts. Many teachers who are very good at other aspects have to quit their jobs due to failing classroom management.

In a qualitative study by Alver, Sancak and Kesicioğlu (2010), early childhood pre-service teachers believe that they will have difficulty in coping with misbehaviour and classroom management. Thus, it is important for pre-service teachers to make provisions that will increase their classroom management skills. They need to have opportunities to practice their classroom management skills especially during practicum. However, Işıkoğlu, İvrendi and Şahin (2007) found early childhood pre-service teachers are faced with a dilemma between the reality in the classrooms where they practice in and their understandings, skills and beliefs. In reference to this, P4 stated the following:

“I do not think classroom management is like the one in teaching practicum course. Because children are used to their own teacher’s method instead of our teaching method, so we have a difficulty... . When I become a teacher, I will form my classroom management style by consulting various sources. Also, opinions of experienced people are important.”

Besides consulting various sources and experienced people, participants’ solutions, such as determining classroom rules together with children, can be proposed as an effective way to form a democratic classroom environment. Cooperation with families about behaviour management provides that children’s behaviour which was gained at school becomes permanent. Further, planning activities towards children’s interests can be considered as a practice that will minimize children’s misbehaviour.

Participants had concerns about communication with children on the very first day of school ($f = 19$). Their solutions only emphasized games (play-based activities) on the first day ($f = 3$); taking children outside, getting help from families and keeping calm but frequencies of these suggestions were very low ($f = 1$). The National Early Childhood Education Programme (The Ministry of National Education, 2006) is a developmental programme that has emphasized that all activities should be play-based and children should freely gain experience. From this point of view, the fact that participants’ solutions concentrated on more play-based activities on the first days of school seems to ignore that play is actually required to be practised throughout the whole learning process.

Another communication concern was about being unable to communicate effec-

tively with children ($f = 7$). Participants expressed the opinion that making warm and close contact with children starting from the first day ($f = 8$) and consulting books ($f = 5$) could be solutions. Moreover participants stated they could communicate more effectively with children as they gained experience ($f = 5$).

P1 stated the following reasons for communication concerns:

“As I am working in the institution of pre-school education, I think I have gained enough experience for the first years of teaching and found the chance for practice. But if I had not worked, I am sure my level of concern would be very high. Because I think practicum and school experience is very limited. As practicum is just half a day a week, we have a communication problem with children in the classroom. Today was my last day of practicum and my friend from practicum told me that he / she does not even know the names of many children in the classroom. So communication is very poor. According to me, field observation should start in the 2nd term of the 1st year. And practicum should be in 2nd and 3rd years... Practicum should be at least 2 days in a week.”

According to Brekelmans, Wubbels and Den Brok (2002) communication between teacher and child in the learning environment is an important element affecting the learning process of the child. Pianta and Stuhlman (2004:444) found “reliable” and “developed” teacher-child relationships in early childhood have a close relation to the formation of appropriate behaviours and children encountering fewer problems in later processes of learning. In this respect, teachers’ having enough knowledge and skills has a place in their communication with children. However, as P1 stated above, student teachers need to spend more time with children in classrooms to see and improve their own communication skills. On the other hand, Işıkoğlu et al. (2007) determined that pre-service teachers feel like strangers and have difficulties communicating with teachers in the classrooms so that they cannot perform adequately during their practicum.

In relation to the concerns about children with special needs, such solutions as participating in educational activities ($f = 7$), taking support from counsellors and experts ($f = 4$), and conducting research ($f = 2$) were expressed. P2 expressed the concerns about inclusive education as follows:

“One of the subjects that I am most concerned of is not being able to know how to educate my inclusive student if I have one. Alright, we took special education course but we just learned the definitions and implications of the problems. If I have such a student, I am concerned about what to do.”

Schnailberg (1969 cited in Belk, 2005:2) expressed that in-service training, working with a special education consultant, attending inclusion conferences, involving parents in the programme are useful for teachers to be ready for studying with inclusion children. Furthermore, teachers are expected to gain sufficient knowledge and skills regarding inclusive education. However, in the early childhood teaching programme determined by higher education institutions in Turkey, there is no inclusive education

course. Some universities (e.g. Hacettepe University, Gazi University) include this course as an elective course in their programme. Moreover, the course of special education takes place in the programme as a theoretical course with two credits only in one term. In this case, the teacher training programme can be considered inadequate in terms of pre-service teachers' improving skills related to inclusive education practices.

Table 1 Frequencies of participants' concerns about children and solutions

Sub-categories	Concerns	<i>f</i>	Solutions	<i>f</i>	
Classroom management	Classroom management in general	31	Creating classroom rules together with children	8	
			Reading necessary books	7	
			Getting experienced colleagues' opinion about classroom management	7	
			Planning attractive activities	5	
			Trying different methods for classroom management	4	
			Determining rules at the beginning of the year (not with students) and being determined	2	
			Hanging classroom rules which are illustrated on the walls of the classroom	1	
			Being unable to cope with children with behavioural problems	6	
			Conducting research	4	
			Telling the child the behaviour is wrong	2	
Cooperation with the family of the child who have behavioural problems	2				
Making children gain right behaviour not with punishment but present	2				
Ccommunication with children	Communication with children on first day of school	19	Concentrating on game activities on the first days of the school	3	
			I make children go outside more on the first days	1	
			I can provide that parents are with their children on the first days so that it helps children to adapt	1	
			Trying to be patient and cool	1	
			Making a warm and close contact with children starting from the first days	8	
	Communicating with children in an effective way	7	Having experience	5	
			Reading necessary books	5	
	Children not getting used to the teacher	3	3	Developing a warm relation with the children	3
	Children's negative attitude towards school	3	3	Planning activities to recognise the children and for them to recognise each other	2
	Being impatient with children	2	2	Participating in activities about personal development	1
			Developing hobbies to decrease the level of stress	1	

Table 1 continued

Sub-categories	Concerns	<i>f</i>	Solutions	<i>f</i>
Disable children and inclusion	Approaching and helping children with special needs	11	Participating in activities such as seminars and in-service training	7
	Being insufficient in inclusive education	7	Getting support from professions and counsellors	4
			Conducting research	2
	Not being able to recognise the child with an emotional problem	2	Getting support from professions and counsellors	3
			Preparing other children for children with special needs and arranging the classroom environment	2
	Preparing other families	1		
Trying to learn more about the children by communicating with the families	1			

Concerns about parents and solutions

The concerns about parents category included communication ($f = 34$) and attitudes of parents ($f = 22$). Concerns about communication mostly concentrated on not establishing effective contacts with parents ($f = 21$); with regard to this, the effective usage of body language and being cheerful ($f = 8$) were solutions expressed. There were also participants who expressed that they could communicate effectively as they gained experience ($f = 7$). In addition, getting to know parents by arranging meetings was also proposed ($f = 5$). In the situation of conflicts with parents ($f = 6$), determining rules together with them ($f = 3$) and making a warm contact ($f = 3$) were suggested. Participants expressed that a sincere and friendly approach and constant communication ($f = 8$) generally could be solutions for negative attitudes of parents towards teachers. A solution for the fact that parents consider teachers only as caregivers was to give parents educational seminars.

P3 expressed her concerns about communication with parents and solutions like this:

“I witness from newspapers, television and my own environment that parents treat their children in a very bad way or they do not really care about their children. This situation naturally affects children in a negative way and causes an unhappy and desperate generation to be formed in future. I am afraid for not being able to keep calm enough while responding the parents of the child who is treated badly in my classroom. I believe I will do my best to be calm however I am anxious so that I meet two kinds of parents; one of which is carefree, the other is a big head and react them in a furious way... I envisage such models of negative attitude: How is a calm and conscious reaction? What is a true reaction? What is a right volume...? If I ever have such an experience, I will try to end the problem in the most harmless and constructive way.”

Parent-teacher communication affects children's positive attitudes towards school. It helps parents develop self-efficacy and self-confidence. Teachers should have information about children's cultural features through communication with the parents (Huber, 2003). Additionally, communication has a critical role in terms of parent-teacher cooperation. For instance, teachers and parents need to see one another's communication skills (Swick, 2004). Pre-service teachers need to cooperate with parents and improve their communication skills in order to maintain successful relations with parents. As can be seen from Table 2, participants focused more on the ways of positive communication with the parents ($f = 21$). However, only one ($f = 1$) expression mentioned practising planned, systemized and constant parent communication activities. Similarly, Baum and Schwarz (2004) expressed that pre-service teachers are concerned about the quality and nature of their relationships with parents. They stated that more opportunities for education and experience should be provided to students about effective communication with parents and conflict resolution. On the other hand, the parents' education course in the early childhood teaching programme determined by the higher education institution in Turkey takes place as a two-hour theoretical course in only one term. Furthermore, participants have limited experiences with communication with parents as they have only one day of practicum a week. In this respect, it can be said that pre-service teachers need to have more practice in developing relations with parents.

Concerns about school principals and colleagues and solutions

Concerns about school principal and colleagues were gathered in two sub-categories. Participants substantially had concerns about negative attitudes of school principals ($f = 11$). While there were respondents who thought that negative attitudes would decrease as they gained more experience ($f = 6$), there were also solutions like constantly getting along well and keeping in touch with the school principal and colleagues ($f = 5$). Similarly, Menon and Christou (2002) found that pre-service teachers had negative expectations from school climate and capabilities of the school leaders. School culture is mostly created by learners, teachers and school principals. Interaction between these elements is crucial to achieve school goals such as improving student success. In Turkey, early childhood education centres are formed as two different types which are preschools in primary schools and independent preschools. While most of the principals of independent preschools graduated from the department of early childhood education, a great majority of primary school principals graduated from different teaching departments. In this context, as Hanny (1987 cited in Chell, 1995) stated, effective principals are expected to be effective instructional leaders. On the other hand, Çelikkaya (1999) maintained that school principals should not be expected to be experts in all educational fields. Therefore, administration should be team-work. Correspondingly, early childhood teachers who work at primary schools may face difficulties in making decisions about their instructional issues because the school principal may not have comprehensive knowledge of early childhood education unless

Table 2 Frequencies of participants’ concerns about parents and solutions

Sub-categories	Concerns	<i>f</i>	Solutions	<i>f</i>
Communication with parents	Not being able to communicate with parents in an effective way	21	Speaking “I” language, emphasizing and being smiley	8
			Having experience	7
			Primarily getting to know families	5
			Arranging meetings and individual interviews with parents	4
			Keeping a specific distance with parents (neither so close nor so far)	3
	Conflict with parents	6	Consulting with experienced teachers	2
			Establishing a warm contact with parents	3
			Determining rules with parents at the beginning of the year	3
	Not being able to cooperate with parents	5	Using techniques of anger management	1
			Preparing oneself psychologically	1
Communication with parents with low educational status	2	Encouraging parent participation by sending brochure, letter, booklet etc.	5	
		Establishing a warm contact with parents	2	
		Getting to know family with home visits	2	
Attitudes of parents	Parents’ negative attitudes towards teacher	13	Arranging seminars about family education	2
			Not having high expectations	1
			Sincere and compassionate approach to parents	8
	Parents’ perceiving teacher as a caregiver	5	Being in constant contact with parents	5
			Cooperation with community for family education	1
	Parents’ not valuing the efforts of the teacher	2	Arranging seminars for families	5
Parents’ considering teacher as inexperienced and not taking him/her into consideration	2	Establishing a warm contact with parents	1	
		Cooperating with school principal	1	
		Forming a planned family communication system	1	

the school principal creates a democratic school culture and applies a participatory approach. As Menon and Christou (2002) stated, teacher preparation programmes must train teacher candidates about the realities of the profession because a negative outlook can damage the attitudes of pre-service teachers toward the profession.

Besides, there were participants who expressed that they would be calm and

patient ($f = 2$), and follow their own truths on the subject of negative attitudes of colleagues ($f = 2$). P1 talked about this subject:

“...I am concerned that I will meet teachers who have ‘occupational burnout’ my motivation will decrease in the first years when I start- teaching. Because teachers say from now on that ‘You are idealist now, you come to school once a week, and you will see everything when you start teaching’. I am afraid my motivation will decrease due to this issue.”

Nias (2005) claimed that teachers’ professional development cannot be separated from their personal growth. Concordantly, she maintained that a teacher’s colleagues play a central role in personal development by meeting (or failing to meet) the needs of practical and emotional assistance, referential support, professional stimulation and extension, and the opportunity to influence others. As Waldron and McLeskey (2010) stated, working collaboratively has an important role in improving instructional skills of teachers and increasing student achievement. In this context, participants seem to need to get more support in their teacher education programme for acting as role-models for their colleagues. For this, teacher education programmes may consider developing leadership skills of pre-service teachers as part of strategies dealing with negative attitudes in school environments.

Table 3 Frequencies of participants’ concerns about school principals and colleagues and solutions

Sub-categories	Concerns	f	Solutions	f
Attitudes of school principals	Negative attitudes of school principals	11	To have experience To get on well with school principal and colleagues, to keep in touch	6 5
	Not being able to cooperate with school principals	2	Cooperation with colleagues To tell the importance of early childhood education	1 1
Attitudes of colleagues	Negative attitudes of other teachers	6	To follow his/her own truths when experiencing conflict with colleagues	2
			To be patient and calm	2
			To be a model for others by trying to be a qualified teacher	1

Concerns about environmental conditions and solutions

Environmental conditions concerns included two sub-categories as physical and social environments. The sub-category of physical environment contained the concerns about lack of material and equipment ($f = 15$) and lack of space properties ($f = 3$). Participants’ solutions towards concerns about physical environment and materials generally

focused on the support of family-school-society (cooperation with school management ($f = 3$), collecting donations for school ($f = 3$), asking for simple and residuary materials from families ($f = 3$)). On the contrary, there was only one expression ($f = 1$) about a teacher preparing materials on his/her own. P5 talked about lack of physical conditions like:

“How will I give education in impossibilities if I am assigned to a school in a very remote place? I am concerned whether I will have a class which is almost empty without any materials. For example, if I am in a very poor place, how will I ask for money from families for breakfast and materials every day? ...After a parent says ‘I cannot afford this.’ I think it is meaningless to insist. ...I can have my school donated by contacting (my family). But this is not an exact solution. I do not know how long I can continue this. Or I may ask for very simple foods that every family can have on the menu.”

The National Early Childhood Education Programme (The Ministry of National Education, 2006) ranked the features of a well-planned education programme and stated that planning the learning environment carefully is the most important component of a qualified education programme. Accordingly, educational environments should be appropriate for children’s developmental characteristics; they also should be safe and constructive for children’s problem-solving skills and supportive for their creativity. Therefore, teacher education programmes must train pre-service teachers about dealing with poor school conditions through helping them develop problem-solving skills.

In relation to concerns about social environments, participants expressed their concerns about communication problems which might occur due to cultural and linguistic differences. Their solutions were more like cooperation with families and research about cultural features of the region before starting work. P4 explained those about this subject:

“I am thinking to search for the place I am assigned about cultural differences. I will start to work by accepting their physical appearances and ways of thinking in case both families and children can criticize me.”

Polat (2009) found in the research where he investigated pre-service teachers’ level of susceptibility to multi-cultural education that participants can have troubles about dealing with emotional and psychological problems when they work in a different culture.

Self-oriented concerns and solutions

In terms of self-oriented concerns, the expression of not being able to be an adequate teacher was often used. Solutions for this concern were as follows: conducting research constantly ($f = 10$), following innovations ($f = 7$), keeping in touch with the university ($f = 6$), cooperating with guide people ($f = 5$). P6 expressed her concern about professional competency like this:

“I saw from the school I went to that art activities do not contribute to improve creativity. Monotonous activities are practiced. But I cannot understand exactly how to convert them into creative works. I am confused about how to arrange

activities appropriately enough for each child's interests and skills. At the schools I went to, either for assignments or practicum, I saw that there is only name of the constructivist education but the practice of it does not exist. I do not want to force children for activities as others do."

Table 4 Frequencies of participants' concerns about environmental conditions and solutions

Sub-categories	Concerns	<i>f</i>	Solutions	<i>f</i>
Physical environment	Lack of materials and other equipment	15	Cooperation with school management	3
			Collecting donations for the school	3
			Asking for simple and residuary materials from families	3
			Teacher's preparing the materials	2
			Asking for help from local administrations	2
	Lack of spatial features of school	3	Preparing materials with children	1
			Leading cooperation of school-family-child-teacher	2
Social environment	Communicational problems caused by cultural / lingual differences	15	Cooperation with families	7
			Conducting research about cultural features of the region before starting to work	5
			Trying to get rid of prejudices about cultural differences	2

Recently, constructivism has been the most significant approach in early childhood education and constructivist programmes have widely been conducted all around the world. Accordingly, the National Early Childhood Education Programme (The Ministry of National Education, 2006) has been designed in accordance with the constructivist approach in Turkey. According to Işıkoğlu (2008), to meet this curricular change, teacher candidates need to conceptualize and employ constructivist instructional approaches during their pre-service training. She suggested that a constructivist learning environment where pre-service teachers can observe constructivist teaching while acquiring a theoretical knowledge of constructivism has an important role in encouraging constructivist beliefs. However, Holt-Reynolds (1992 cited in Işıkoğlu, 2008:190) suggested that most of pre-service teachers' beliefs are traditional, as the result of their frequent exposure to a didactic and traditional learning environment. Therefore, teacher preparation programmes should embed the opportunities of constructivist practices into the educational programme. Thus, pre-service teachers can connect theory and practice by observing, taking part in and assessing in the real

world. However, this seems to be challenging for teacher educators in consideration of the fact that “simply accommodating innovation in the existing institutional structure will not provide the long-term support necessary for lasting change” (Condon et al., 1993 cited in Khalid & Azeem, 2012:172). From this point of view, teacher education programmes should constantly be adjusted to support in-service and pre-service teachers in terms of understanding and practising constructivist approaches.

Furthermore, teachers are expected to keep pace with the era by constantly renewing themselves, to be able to reflect innovations into their education programs and practices with the rapidly changing research and practices. Regarding solutions of participants about this subject, constant cooperation with the university which is an environment where information is produced and shared, conducting research about the subject, and sharing information with colleagues are beneficial for teachers to develop their professional information and skills. Being an individual who constantly renews him/herself, conducting research, becomes a productive person takes place among the features of an effective teacher (The Ministry of National Education, 2006). In this respect, solutions expressed by pre-service teachers seem to be related to the features of an effective teacher.

In terms of concerns about not being able to give equal education in crowded classrooms, participants stated that they could plan small group activities and arrange environments to facilitate observing children. According to Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı (2012a), numbers of students should be a maximum of 20 in early childhood classrooms. However, many classrooms have more than 20 students in Denizli. In addition, some of these classrooms’ sizes do not meet the standards of the Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı (2012b). Pre-service teachers generally go to the classrooms for practicum as threesomes. Hence, classrooms become more crowded with students, the teacher, assistant teacher, and pre-service teachers as well.

However, according to Fredriksen and Rhodes (2004) teachers can form a more positive emotional atmosphere inside the classroom and more often interact with specific children when the number of students in the classroom is low. In addition, children have more positive relationships with their teachers when they have the idea that they are in a school environment where they are cared about. In this context, participants’ solutions such as arranging the learning environment to observe and communicate with each child, and grouping children, are considered effective solutions.

One of the other concerns was “not being able to develop children’s creativity and special skills” ($f= 11$). For this, solutions such as consulting books, cooperating with families and arranging the environment were stated. Other concerns about professional competency were being inexperienced, not being able to prepare effective plans, and remaining unsolved towards problems. Creativity is at the foreground in the National Early Childhood Education Programme (The Ministry of National Education, 2006); supporting child’s creativity forms one of the main features of the program. Moreover, teachers need to get to know the children very well to develop their creativity; prepare environments and programmes appropriate for their necessities and interests. In this

respect, teacher educators must help pre-service teachers to develop an understanding about the nature of creativity in early years so that they observe and recognize each child's abilities and apply developmentally appropriate programmes to support creativity.

Table 5 Frequencies of participants' self-oriented concerns and solutions

Sub-categories	Concerns	<i>f</i>	Solutions	<i>f</i>
Professional competency	Not being able to be an adequate teacher for children	30	Conducting research constantly	10
			Following innovations	7
			Keeping in touch with the university	6
			Sharing with guide people	5
			Participating in academic activities like seminars	3
			Working in a planned way	2
			Participating in personal development activities	2
	Not being able to develop children's creativity and special skills	11	Consulting books	8
			Cooperating with families	6
			Arranging environments to observe children	2
	Inexperience	5	Cooperation with experienced teachers	3
			Being patient	2
			Participating in academic activities like seminars	2
	Not being able to prepare an effective plan	4	Consulting with experienced teachers	3
Participating in activities like seminars, courses etc.			3	
Not being able to give equal education to all children in crowded classrooms	3	Consulting books	2	
		Conducting group work activities	2	
Not being able to find solutions	3	Arranging environments to observe children	2	
		Consulting books	2	
		Communication with the university	2	
		Attending personal development activities	2	

Conclusions

This study has shown that because pre-service teachers believe that their concerns will decrease as they have more experience, they may need more practice in their profession. Apparently, more practicum opportunities within teacher training programmes are required to improve their professional skills such as communicating with children and trying different teaching approaches.

Moreover, teacher education programmes should be enhanced to meet teacher

candidates' needs for being efficient about communication with parents, teaching children with special needs, and implementing inclusive education programmes. To give a reason for the concerns about parents, pre-service teachers cannot completely be included in the classroom as they have one day of practice in a week within the scope of school experience and teaching practice courses. Only the classroom teacher communicates with parents one-to-one. Because of the fact that early childhood education cannot be separated from families, it is considered that providing more opportunities to communicate with families would be helpful. Additionally, being in need of practice is confronted in terms of inclusive education too. In other words, pre-service teachers become more sufficient when they are exposed to chances to practise their knowledge about training children with special needs.

Based on participants' concerns and solution proposals, providing various communication opportunities such as exchanging information and sharing experiences could be taken into consideration for both pre-service and in-service teachers. For instance, supportive educational programmes, seminars, workshops, conferences can be arranged regularly and sharing settings can be formed through the Internet towards teachers with the cooperation of formal and private institutions. In this way, early childhood teachers will have more opportunities to get the benefit of each others' knowledge and experience and to maintain their professional development as well as to improve their self-efficacy. School principals can also benefit from these opportunities to obtain knowledge about early childhood education and thereby develop positive attitudes towards early-childhood teachers.

In addition, this study indicates that pre-service teachers need to have the chance of practising on different socio-economic levels and cultural environments with linguistic and cultural differences. To the extent possible, faculties within the context of various projects must provide opportunities to pre-service teachers to get to know families, children and physical conditions – not only in schools downtown where the university is situated, but also in different cities and countryside.

Finally, this study was limited by a relatively small sample size and hence the findings may not be generalizable to other populations. Moreover, further in-depth studies and also perhaps a larger qualitative study, through interviews with the early childhood pre-service teachers, could be conducted in terms of concerns and solutions. Furthermore, additional research should examine on which level early childhood pre-service teachers' concerns continue when they start their profession and practise their solutions, and how effective these are. In addition, documented coping strategies of concerns could be useful for future early childhood pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and teacher educators as training materials.

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