

Professional development experiences and expectations for early childhood teachers in Kosovo

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The work of educators (early childhood teachers) with children in pre-schools, carried out through many learning and educational activities, is an important but quite complex process. This study focuses on professional development for educators that targets challenges in working with children, and aims to enhance their performance based on education policies in pre-schools. This article therefore analyses the perceptions of educators and pre-school managers about the importance of systematic professional development for improving educators' performance, as regulated by standard 5 of the *General Standards of Pre-school Education in Kosovo (ages 3-6)* (MEST, 2006). The research is based on data collected through quantitative surveys with educators (N=113) and interviews with 6 pre-school directors. By identifying the importance of professional development for standards in pre-school education, impact will be achieved by raising awareness among staff within pre-schools about improving their performance and achieving successful outcomes for children.

Introduction

Teachers' professional development (PD) activities are related to children's learning outcomes (Guskey & Sparks, 2002, p. 1). Professional development for early childhood teachers includes the whole field of education and training offered, from workshops to university degrees (Whitebook et al., 2009). Pre-service training includes the formal education necessary to become a certified teacher, whereas in-service teacher professional development includes teacher training opportunities while working with children (Friendly, Grady, MacDonald & Forer, 2015; Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai & Kipnis, 2009). The importance of professional development is also emphasised in section 5c of the *General Standards of Pre-school Education in Kosovo (ages 3-6)* (MEST, 2006).

The role and responsibility of teachers and students in the field of education has changed with social, scientific, economic and technological change (Griffin, Care & McGaw, 2012). During these changes and developments, teachers have a major influence on the education system (Dolton, Marcenaro Gutierrez, De Vries & She, 2018; Metzler & Woessmann, 2012). The main aim of education in the context of these developments is to build basic student skills (Jacobson-Lundeberg, 2016; Ujlakyné Szucs, 2009).

Professional development programs are expanding to improve the academic success of children, and the demand for trained educators is increasing (Ackerman, 2004) since teachers trained to work with children in early childhood have been shown to have better performance when working with children (Lobman, Ryan, McLaughlin & Ackerman, 2004).

Within professional development activities, factors such as self-esteem - the degree to which individuals believe they are capable and successful - prepare the individual to

respond according to their personal expectations of success (Leary & McDonald, 2003). Professional self-esteem reflects professional adaptation and satisfaction (Aricak & Dilmac, 2003).

This paper specifically focuses on the self-esteem of educators regarding their performance while working with children, as a product of their continuous professional development activities, which is seen to have a direct impact on children's achievement. In the context of Standard 5 of the *Standards* of pre-school education, the research aims to identify pre-school managers' perceptions of the state and importance of professional development, on educators' performance while working with children; i.e. their professional competence.

Given these research purposes, we pose the following research questions:

1. Are the professional development paths and activities available to early childhood teachers effective in increasing their self-esteem and improving their self-evaluated performance when working with children?
2. Are there significant differences between public and private pre-schools in terms of opportunities for professional development?
3. What are the views of managers of public and private pre-schools about the state and importance of professional development for early childhood teachers and staff, in particular as specified in the Kosovo Government's *General Standards of Pre-school Education* in Kosovo?

Professional learning in early childhood

The knowledge base of international literature and policies for early childhood education continues to undergo changes. One of these changes is participation in opportunities for professional development, whether formal or informal, where educators discuss ideas and theories, as well as identifying meaningful ways of knowing, which they then put into practice (Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 2008).

Professional development of early childhood educators

A number of authors (Milovanović, Kokić, Kristiansen, Gera, Ikonomi, Kafedžić, Milić, Rexhaj, Spasovski & Closs, 2014; and authors cited therein) have noted that effective education can be promoted, among other ways, through professionally developed staff.

The culture created within institutions means the creation of a network of rules, behaviours and norms that have an impact on the life and work of individuals. This includes professional development that aims not only at professional advancement, but also at changing the institutional culture, in this case the culture of the institution of early education (Vujičić & Čamber Tambolaš, 2017). Professional development is thus important in order to meet educational reform criteria, to improve teaching quality, to

apply innovative strategies and to stimulate children's critical thinking (Bicaj & Treska, 2014).

The career path of educational staff in Kosovan pre-schools

In Kosovo, teacher professional development is addressed in the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (MEST, 2016). This document is divided into seven program areas with the fourth area addressing teacher professional development, which aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

Article 28 of Law no. 02/L-52 on Pre-school Education introduces qualification requirements. Clause 28.1. states that "pre-school education activities shall be carried out by pre-school educators ... who must have a degree from the Faculty of Education pre-school program" - Article 28.4.a. (Assembly of Kosovo, 2006).

The Strategic Framework for Teacher Development in Kosovo (MEST, 2017) and Administrative Instruction (AI) No.5/2017 (MEST, 2017) address teacher career development, setting the standards for teachers throughout their career. Teachers' professional learning is divided into three phases: (a) pre-service, (b) entry stage in the profession and (c) career development (MEST, 2017).

According to the description in the Strategic Framework for Teacher Development in Kosovo, professional development should be coherent with the system of teacher licensing throughout a career.

Overview of public and private pre-schools in Kosovo

Within government and education policies for dealing with public and private institutions, the *National Development Strategy 2016-2021* (Office of the Prime Minister, 2016) is of particular significance. Given the importance of the inclusion of children in early childhood education, the strategy emphasises increasing the number of public and private institutions and encouraging expansion of private institutions. In addition, the *Law on Pre-School Education* (Assembly of Kosovo, 2006), supports parental choice between private and public institutions in section 13.1, as well as (in Article 26) the licensing of private institutions by MEST, which is also highlighted in the *Government Program 2020-2023* (Government of Kosovo, 2020). What distinguishes private institutions, according to the Law, is the means by which the institution is established, so that "The founder of public pre-schools is the municipality, while the founders of other pre-schools are private legal entities" (Assembly of Kosovo, 2006).

Referring to the literature on public and private institutions in Kosovo, the question arises as to whether private institutions are in reality supported, as public institutions are, when it comes to professional development for educational staff.

General standards of pre-school education

The *General Standards of Pre-school Education in Kosovo* (ages 3-6) document contains the requirements and criteria that pre-schools must meet. This document clearly presents the importance of staff development within pre-schools, considering the staff to be the most important factor in high quality education. Item A.5 in this document presents an obligation for the staff to take part in continuous professional development activities. Moreover, section C addresses the necessity for professional development (referred to as 'staff qualification' in the document) of educational staff in pre-schools. So are pre-schools referring to these educational policies that require educators' professional development?

Method

Research design

This paper is based on deductive reasoning (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007), with a focus on the descriptive analysis (Loeb et al., 2017) of variables in both their theoretical and empirical aspect, considering the relationship between dependent and independent variables (Creswell, 2012, p. 120). This paper is based on both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

Quantitative design

The research adopted a quantitative methodology, in order to measure the perceived self-esteem and self-evaluated performance of Kosovan educators, in relation to their professional development paths. The survey used a standardised questionnaire as a measurement instrument (Ortiz, 2011). The questionnaire was modeled upon selected items from Ortiz's Arizona State University doctoral dissertation, because very few of the surveys available from the literature were designed expressly for early childhood teachers. The questionnaire was modified to suit the current study requirements. It consisted of 21 questions, 13 of which were general and background questions and the others measured educators' attitudes, knowledge and skills, educators' performance, and their self-esteem. The questionnaire included questions designed to measure the experience of educators, and their perception of their own professional development and performance. Full anonymity and confidentiality was ensured (see Appendix 1).

The questionnaire was programmed into *KoBoToolbox* (<https://www.kobotoolbox.org>), a tool used for data collection, and administered online. Filters were applied where appropriate and the program did not allow for repeated forms. The questionnaire was administered in Albanian language and was distributed online in various groups of educators.

Sample size

The research included a total of 113 respondents in 10 municipalities in Kosovo. Table 1 depicts the demographic characteristics of the sample interviewed for the study.

Respondents were most frequently aged 31-40 years (36%), and from the municipality of Prishtina (43%). The majority (59%) of the sample were in public pre-schools, and had a degree from the Faculty of Education (51%). Most commonly respondents had 1-3 years experience as educators (33%).

Table1: Demographic characteristics of the survey sample (N=113)

Demographics		Frequency	Valid %
Gender	Female	113	100
	Male	0	0
Age	25-30 years	29	25.7
	31-40 years	41	36.3
	41-50 years	24	21.2
	51-65 years	19	16.8
Institution	Public pre-school	67	59.3
	Private pre-school	46	40.7
Qualification	HPS (Higher Pedagogical School)/ the department for educators	3	2.7
	Faculty of Education/ pre-school department	58	51.3
	Masters	7	6.2
	Psychology	3	2.7
	Pedagogy	3	2.7
	Albanian language and literature	1	0.9
	Child care and welfare (at a private university)	28	24.8
Experience as an educator	Other	10	8.8
	1-3 years	37	32.7
	4-8 years	24	21.2
	9-14 years	20	17.7
	15-20 years	22	19.5
	21+ years	10	8.8

Fieldwork and data cleaning and analysis

Data collection was conducted between June and July, 2020. The data was cleaned and analysed for the quantitative survey in the *SPSS Statistical Package for Social Sciences* (SPSS, 2007), and tables were generated for each question. During this phase, the data was confirmed not to contain any errors, inconsistencies or missing information.

Relevant statistical tests were generated in order to test the research questions that serve the purposes of this study. These tests were used to find patterns and trends within the raw data. The interpretation of relevant tests can be found in the results section below.

Qualitative design

In order to capture the views of pre-school directors about the state and importance of professional development, and learn about their ways of evaluating educators' performance, in-depth interviews with directors were conducted during January 2020.

These interviews served to validate and complement the results derived from the survey with educators.

Prior to conducting the interviews, a short guideline was prepared as an outline of the key elements that were to be discussed during the interviews, given the research objectives. The guidelines for the semi-structured interview contained a quick description of the objectives of the study and ensured confidentiality of responses. In addition, six open questions were prepared in order to help guide the discussion, based on item 5 in the *General Standards* (see Appendix 2).

Each interview lasted about 30 minutes and the sessions were transcribed, in order to be able to report and interpret the findings accurately. In total, 6 interviews were conducted with directors of pre-schools, in three municipalities in Kosovo where AAB College operates (Prishtina, Ferizaj and Gjakova). Three interviewees were directors of public pre-schools and three were directors of private pre-schools (Table 2).

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of participants in the interviews (N=6)

Participant	Gender	Experience as a manager	No. children at the institution where the participant works	No. employees at the institution
I 1	Female	3 years	408	73
I 2	Female	9 years	30	7
I 3	Female	1 year	205	39
I 4	Female	3 years	60	8
I 5	Female	2.5 years	420	46
I 6	Female	5 years	50	11

Findings: Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative research was carried out with educators in pre-schools to analyse their perception of their work with children.

Regression analysis

A regression analysis was conducted in order to answer the first research question, namely “Are the in-service professional development paths and activities available to early childhood teachers effective in increasing their self-esteem and improving their self-evaluated performance when working with children?”

The following table offers descriptive statistics of variables included in the regression model. During analysis it was observed that the number of overall training sessions had no impact on our dependent variables, whereas the hours of training in the last 12 months did; the latter was therefore used for the regression analysis.

The independent variable in our model is the number of hours of training during the last 12 months, as measured by the question: “How many hours of professional development

(training) have you completed during the last 12 months?”. The dependent variables include the level of expertise as an educator when working with children (perceived self-esteem), as measured by the question: “How would you rate your level of preparation (as an educator) when working with children? (1=Not at all prepared to 5=Very much prepared)”, and performance in the classroom regarding teaching skills (self-assessment of performance), as measured by the question: “How would you rate your performance in the classroom regarding your teaching skills? (1=Very poor to 6=Excellent)”.

Results in Table 3 show that respondents have completed on average 18.63 hours of training during the last 12 months, with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 64. On average, educators rated their level of expertise when working with children at 4.45, with a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 5, while they rated their performance in the classroom higher (5.39), with a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 6.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of variables used in the regression model (N=113)

	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. dev.
Hours of training during the last 12 months	18.63	0	64	17.888
Level of expertise as an educator when working with children (1-5)	4.45	2	5	0.582
Level of performance in the classroom regarding teaching skills (1-6)	5.39	2	6	0.818

Table 4: Correlation between variables used in the initial regression model (N=113)

		1	2	3
1. Hours of training during the last 12 months	Pearson correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	108		
2. Level of preparation as an educator when working with children (1-5)	Pearson correlation	.194*	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.044		
	N	108	108	
3. Level of performance in the classroom regarding teaching skills (1-6)	Pearson correlation	.245*	.603*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.011	0.000	
	N	108	113	113

Furthermore, Table 4 shows the bivariate correlations between the variables tested in the regression model. As can be observed, the hours of professional training during the last 12 months are positively correlated with the level of preparation as an educator when working with children ($r=.194$, $p<.05$) and with the level of performance in the classroom regarding teaching skills ($.245$, $p<.05$). Moreover, our two dependent variables are positively correlated with one another ($r=.603$, $p<.01$).

Model 1: Educators' self-esteem

This model (Table 5) shows the impact of the hours of training completed in the last 12 months on increasing the rating of the level of preparation as an educator when working with pre-school children. A simple linear regression was calculated to predict this impact. A significant regression equation was found ($F_{(1, 106)} = 4.161$, $p < .05$), with an adjusted R square of .029. The score of the latter means that the model explains 2.9 percent of the variability in the level of preparation. In other words, respondents' level of self-perceived preparation increased by 0.006 points for each hour of training completed.

Table 5: Final regression model for educators' self-esteem: Model 1

Summary	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate
	.194 (a)	0.038	0.029	0.576

a. Predictors: (Constant), Item 10. How many hours of professional development (training) have you had during the last 12 months?

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
ANOVA	Regression	1.380	1	1.380	4.161	.044 (b)
	Residual	35.166	106	0.332		
	Total	36.546	107			

a. Dependent variable: 17. How would you rate your level of preparation (as an educator) when working with children?
 b. Predictors: (Constant), 10. How many hours of professional development (training) have you had during the last 12 months?

Coefficients		Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	t	Sig
		B	Std. error	Beta		
(a)	(Constant)	4.317	0.080		53.816	0.000
	Hours of training during the last 12 months	0.006	0.003	0.194	2.040	0.044

a. Dependent variable: 17. How would you rate your level of preparation (as an educator) when working with children?

Model 2: Educators' self-perceived performance

This model (Table 6) shows the impact of the hours of training completed in the last 12 months on increasing the rating of the level of performance when working with pre-school children. A simple linear regression was calculated to predict this impact. A significant regression equation was found ($F_{(1, 106)} = 6.768$, $p < .05$), with an adjusted R square of .051. The score of the latter means that the model below explains 5.1 percent of the variability in the level of performance. Thus, respondents' level of self-rated performance in the classroom increased by 0.011 points for each hour of training completed.

Table 6: Final regression model for level of performance in the classroom when working with children: Model 2

Summary	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate		
	.245 (a)	0.060	0.051	0.806		
a. Predictors: (Constant), Item 10. How many hours of professional development (training) have you had during the last 12 months?						
ANOVA		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
	Regression	4.393	1	4.393	6.768	.011 (b)
(a)	Residual	68.793	106	0.649		
	Total	73.185	107			
a. Dependent variable: 19. How would you rate your performance in the classroom regarding your teaching skills?						
b. Predictors: (Constant), 10. How many hours of professional development (training) have you had during the last 12 months?						
Coefficients		Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised	t	Sig
		B	Std. error	Beta		
(a)	(Constant)	5.159	0.112		45.986	0.000
	Hours of training during the last 12 months	0.011	0.004	0.245	2.602	0.011
a. Dependent variable: 19. How would you rate your performance in the classroom regarding your teaching skills?						

t-test analysis

Regarding the second research question: "Are there significant differences between public and private pre-schools in terms of training received?", a t-test analysis was conducted. Results show that employees in private institutions have had significantly less training on topics related to early childhood ($M=3.35$, $SD=2.7$), compared to employees in public institutions ($M=7.76$, $SD=7.8$). As such, differences between these two groups are significant ($t_{(111)} = -3.672$, $p=.00$).

Table 7: Public vs. private institutions analysis: Group statistics

9. How many professional development trainings on any topic related to early childhood education have you had in your career?	3. You work at a:	N	Mean	Std. dev.	Std. error
					mean
	Private institution	46	3.35	2.710	0.400
	Public institution	67	7.76	7.826	0.956

Table 8: Independent samples t-test analysis of PD opportunities for public and private institutions

	Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means							
	Equal variances	F	Sig	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean diff.	Std error diff.	Lower	Upper
Assumed		7.661	.007	-3.672	111	.000	-4.413	1.202	-6.795	-2.032
Not assumed				-4.259	87.165	.000	-4.413	1.036	-6.473	-2.354

Findings: Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative method applied in this study complements and enriches the research with additional information and perspectives in support of the quantitative findings. The qualitative approach refers to how the world and the immediate environment is understood, namely personal perception, building individual perspectives based on experience (Saqipi, Asunta & Korpinen, 2014).

The unprocessed data from the interviews were placed in the table, categorised and coded, and indicators were created. From the table with general data, the issues relevant to the paper were identified and topics for discussions were drawn. The relevant research topics were presented in schemes and, based on them, categories and subtopics were created for analysis, revisiting initial data from time to time and creating diagrams.

The outcomes from the interviews provide the management perspective and a clear answer to research question 3: "What are the views of managers of public and private pre-schools about the state and importance of professional development for early childhood teachers and staff, in particular as specified in the Kosovo Government's *General Standards of Pre-school Education* in Kosovo?" Based on the thematic analysis presented, the situation in pre-schools is not satisfactory. According to the diagram (Figure 1), we will see that from the interview protocol and resulting outcomes, we have three topics to elaborate concerning general standards, the state of PD and procedures for performance observation.

1. *General Standards of Pre-school Education* document and its application

The results from the first topic provide us with a management perspective and the reasons why pre-school directors believe the *General Standards of Pre-school Education* in Kosovo should be applied. These include the need to develop internal institutional policies, to evaluate the work of teachers, and to improve institutional activities (Figure 1). The reasons given in support of implementing this document make it clear that professional development is necessary and important for improving working practices and staff performance. The idea of Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) that investment in human capital is an indispensable and uncompromising action by competent institutions, is also emphasised.

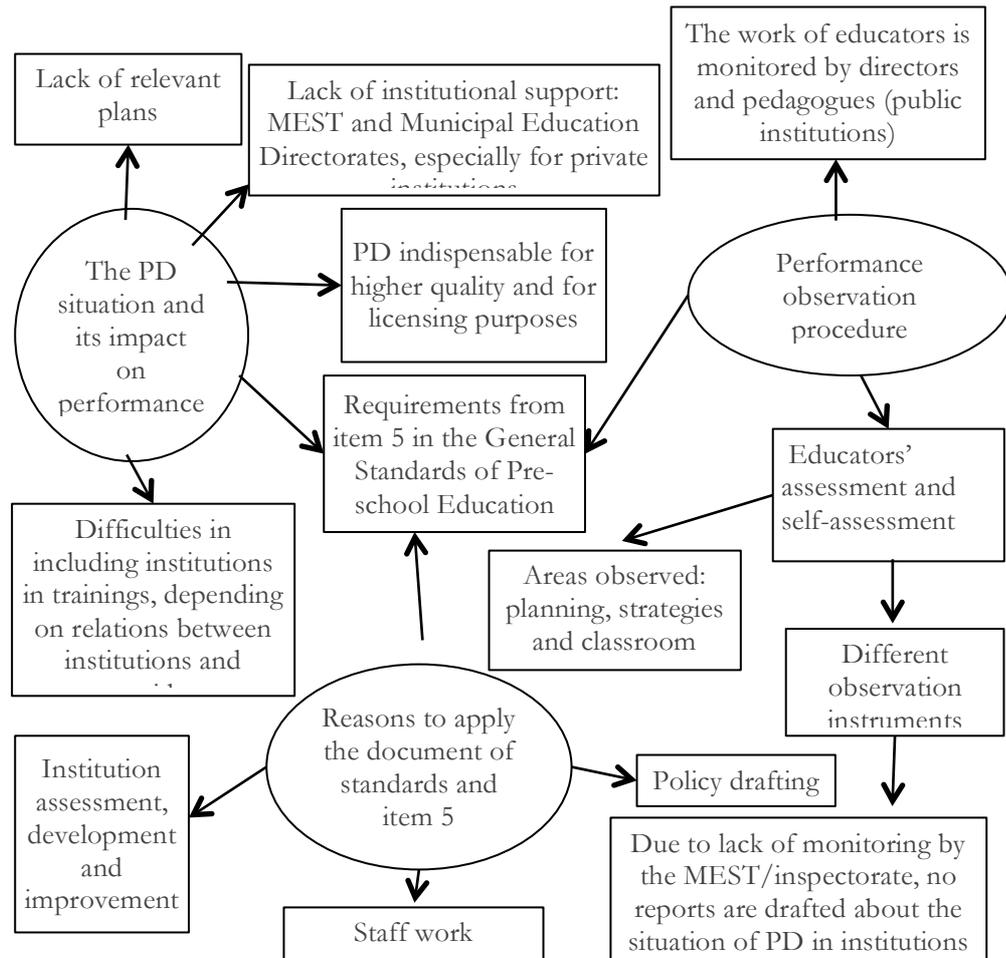


Figure 1: The diagram of PD-related topics and categories and *General Standards of Pre-school Education* criteria

2. The state of PD according to article 5 of the *General Standards of Pre-school Education* and its impact on educators' performance

The second topic highlights the directors' view of the general state of professional development. Interviewees with the codes I1, I3 and I5 are employees in public institutions. Interviewees with the codes I2, I4 and I6 are employees in private institutions (in the three regions where the research was conducted).

Based on the interviews, PD activities are seen as necessary for improving the performance of educators, but there are difficulties encountered in implementing item 5 of the *General Standards*. In our question as to whether or not they have a plan that specifically sets out staff training during any given period, the responses indicated the lack

of a specific document. Interviewee I1, who was from a public institution, refers to the institution's general development plan; whereas interviewees from private institutions refer to their institution's strategic plan:

We have the institution's *strategic plan*, part of which is also staff professional development in several sections... (I2)

No, I do not possess a development plan... (I6).

In this case, despite the mentions of teacher development in some sections, the emphasis is on educator training, but without referring to specifics, among others the needs and requirements of educators. This reduces the possibility of developing any other form of professional development within the institution, whether in-house professional development or mentoring, which are highlighted in the *Strategic framework for teacher development in Kosovo* (MEST, 2017).

In addition, according to the directors of public institutions, there are difficulties in participating in training, and participation is to a large degree dependent on the relationship between the institution and training providers. The only training for educators where there is no difficulty in terms of participation is the training on the new curriculum from MEST. On the other hand, private institutions are not supported by MEST and the MED (Municipal Education Directorate) for their educators' professional development. Training for educators is organised on the initiative of pre-school institutions' management. One of the directors of a public institution in Kosovo said:

The training from Save the Children was particularly helpful for improving education quality, with educators being flexible about the strategies they apply, about individual plans (I3).

She (I3) said that an instrument for observation of early childhood development and learning was produced at the training. This document is used by educators to observe children and their development in different areas, and this helps to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

On the subject of institutional support, a slightly more positive approach is observed in public institutions, as illustrated below:

The basic training which is offered by MEST and the MED is training on the new curriculum, for educators working with 5-6 year-olds (I5)

Those who have attended various training opportunities in addition to curriculum training. Educators who work with children aged 0-5 years have completed a range of training, including the training on standards... (I1)

In regard to institutional support for educational staff PD, the viewpoint of one of the interviewees from a private institution is that:

Something worth mentioning is that competent institutions, be that the Ministry or the MED, do not offer PD for private institutions (I2).

From these statements, we can conclude that opportunities for PD in private pre-schools are more limited than those in public pre-schools.

3. Procedures for performance observation by competent bodies

The third aspect, related to observations of educators' work, is taken seriously by institutions. According to the directors interviewed, management was responsible for supervision, whereas one of the public institutions said that the pedagogue in the institution also offered ongoing supervision of educator performance. No external assessment of educators was mentioned as being carried out by the MED or the MEST inspectorate. The *Instrument for assessing quality practices in early childhood services for children from 3 to 6 years old*, used by management to assess staff competencies, may be obtained from the International Step by Step Association (ISSA, 2012a). Along with it is the *Professional development tool for improving quality of practices in kindergarten* (ISSA, 2012b). According to interviewee I1:

This document is also a requirement of the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP). Moreover, professors from the Faculty of Education and Education Inspectors were trained on how to apply this instrument. The instrument is filled in by the institution's manager and forms part of a file, but it is not given to educators. It includes areas, such as: 1. Interaction; 2. Family and Community; 3. Inclusion, diversity and the values of democracy; 4. Planning and assessment; 5. Teaching strategies; 6. Learning environment, etc.

For example, to observe the area of school and community, you enter a room where there is a family corner and in the corner you should see at least a photo of a family or a family tree. Although the family topic is not part of that day, we should see that at least it is presented in one corner. It means that we observe how educators apply interaction, inclusion in their activities... Then we observe the assessment and planning area, for example whether educators have observation protocols, checklists and written assessments they have done. We observe teaching strategies applied by an educator in the classroom (I1).

On the other hand, some of the public institutions also use a self-assessment instrument, and one of the interviewees described it this way:

We use an instrument for educators' self-assessment (a self-assessment form based on the AVSI (*Autovalutazione della scuola dell'infanzia*; Bondioli & Ferrari, 2008)), which is applied twice a year. When applied for the first time, the assessment was not realistic and this caused confusion; whereas the second time we tried to be as reliable as possible while assessing the performance; also the educators assess themselves and submit a report (I2).

Despite the fact that some public institutions present a better situation in terms of professional development, not all institutions have the opportunity, much less private institutions.

Finally, to the question: “How (to whom) do you present or document the performance of each educator?”, the unanimous answer from all the directors interviewed was that they do not draft such a document, since drafting a report about the outcomes of observation and situation encountered was never requested by competent bodies. Sometimes they answered that they keep observation data for the institution’s internal needs.

Discussion

From the data collected and interpreted above, an empirical research discussion framework was created and categorised according to several concrete issues to be analysed. These issues relate to the professional development viewpoints of the two target groups: (a) the perception of educational staff; and (b) the perception of Kosovan pre-school directors. These are reflected upon below in three sections, early childhood educators’ preparation and level of performance, public pre-schools vs. private pre-schools, and professional development from the view of pre-school managers.

1. Early childhood educators’ preparation and level of performance in the classroom

From educators’ perceived self-esteem and level of preparation, we have a clear overview of their performance, based on the regression analysis. In this case, self-assessment is related to two factors: educator training and performance. This accords with the international literature and policies that explain the interconnections in the triangle: changes in the knowledge base on early childhood education, professional learning and opportunities for professional development, and considering the preparation of teachers relevant to the establishment of professional identity. Consequently, to answer the first research question posed in this study: “Are the in-service professional development paths and activities available to early childhood teachers effective in increasing their perceived self-esteem and improving their self-evaluated performance when working with children?”, results show that training has a significant impact in increasing educators’ perceived self-esteem and self-evaluated performance when working with children. However, this impact was only observed when taking into account the hours of training completed in the past 12 months, whereas the overall number of hours of training completed throughout educators’ careers had no significant impact on the abovementioned variables. Consequently, we note that the more training is provided in an ongoing way, the greater the impact on overall professional preparation and self-confidence, but that training organised in earlier periods has less impact on the work of educators. If recent professional development activities have a greater impact on the work of educators, this sends a clear signal to the competent bodies about the organisation of ongoing training.

2. Public pre-schools vs. private pre-schools professional development

Questionnaire results highlight the differences between public and private institutions regarding training. Educators at public pre-schools completed more hours of training in the last year than educators at private pre-schools. Moreover, around one in five educators believe that educators in private institutions are offered fewer training opportunities than educators in public institutions. However, as stated in the theoretical framework above, educational policies in Kosovo do not discriminate between public and private institutions when it comes to training provision. Additionally, results from interviews with management are evidence of the poor opportunities for PD in the private sector. Based on these results, there is reason to believe that there is:

- a. a low level of supervision of private pre-schools by competent authorities;
- b. appointment of non-professional staff in private institutions (from information given in interviews, the appointment of staff is made only by the director who is not accountable for this decision making);
- c. licensing of private pre-schools with no criteria (from information given in interviews, no external observation of the institution is made);
- d. no system for professional development for educational staff;
- e. lack of ongoing support from relevant institutions. Efforts to change the situation are directly related to the shortcomings within the Law on Pre-school Education which does not require accountability for the way that private institutions function, the lack of implementation of the law in regards to early childhood education, and unprofessional work carried out by private pre-schools, with a lack of accountability and reporting.

3. Professional development of early childhood educators from the view of pre-school managers

As in the literature, our results show that professional development, namely implementation of item 5 of the Standards, is indispensable for improving the performance of education staff (MEST, 2006). However, although professional development is one of the requirements of the *General Standards of Pre-school Education* in Kosovo for ages 3-6, it is quite difficult to implement it in pre-schools, especially in private institutions. Difficulties arise due to the lack of cooperation between pre-schools and training providers, the MEST and the MED.

A lack of accountability hinders a full PD offer, and it is the responsibility of the MEST to create a mechanism of accountability in regards to PD for the municipalities (MEST, 2017). In addition, identification of educational staff needs by the MEST and the MED would help to avoid difficulties in terms of cooperation with training providers and selection of adequate training for staff PD. There will be a growing need for other forms of PD, such as mentoring and in-house PD as required by the documents (see above). These will directly improve educators' performance.

The lack of accountability mechanisms also results in a lack of reporting from pre-schools to the MEST and the MED about the situation of professional development in their

institutions. The Inspectorate's lack of involvement in observing the performance of educational staff also has consequences for the institution and the overall PD system. If this could be changed it would result in a higher responsibility at institutional level, an understanding of the importance and role of policymaking, and more serious implementation of PD policies.

Internal observation (by institutions' management and pedagogues) in pre-schools - using instruments from the training providers in cooperation with the MEST - serves the needs of the institution. Pre-schools could thus provide reports on the PD situation and the outcomes from the observation of educators' performance (a) to comply with legal requirements (MEST, 2017); (b) to raise the awareness of management about accountability; (c) to create a culture of PD within the institution; and (d) to directly impact children's development.

Conclusions

Based on the reform of the education system, the requirements for contemporary teachers of the nineteenth century to be willing to accept changes in order to be successful, have made them more in need of work and performance enhancement. Fullan and Hargreaves (2014) identified the link between professional development, change and innovation. In this case, by being demanding, teachers evaluate professional development and reflect on their performance through self-assessment. This article presents this in several ways: a theoretical framework that explains ways for professional development of educators during their careers, and showing the importance of continuous professional development activities as presented in legislative documents. At the same time, we have clarified the purpose of the research through the use of some variables in the educator questionnaire and regression analysis (see findings above). Interviews with educators further reveal the impact of professional development activities on educators' performance.

From the research findings, it can be concluded that the paths and activities for professional development that are offered continuously, especially those of recent years, increase the perceived self-esteem of educators and improve their performance in working with children. Consequently, there is a need to implement the *General Standards of Pre-school Education in Kosovo* (age 3-6), which emphasise the level of professional development for educators in pre-school education. However, there are difficulties in applying this document, especially in private institutions.

Pre-school education policies, starting from the *National Development Strategy 2016-2021* and the *Law on Pre-school Education in Kosovo*, do not make a distinction between the functioning of public and private pre-school institutions. However, the research shows significant differences, especially in the form and possibility of organising and attending activities for professional development by educators. It is evident that the work of private institutions is not supervised and supported by the MED or the MEST, thus allowing for a freedom of action on one hand and lack of seriousness and professionalism on the other hand, and an extremely low level of action and accountability.

The situation in the field of professional development for early childhood teachers and staff is not consistent with the law. Apart from the teacher licensing system (MEST, 2017) that emphasises the necessity for educational staff PD, the current law - operational since 2006 - has shortcomings, among other things in defining teacher PD issues. The difficulty of identifying staff needs is also evident. In addition to the lack of cooperation and reporting between pre-schools and central institutions, there is a deep gap in accountability and lack of a cooperative culture.

Recommendations

Given the features of the current situation we have identified, there are a number of recommendations which would directly serve the MEST, the MED and the Education Inspectorate.

- We recommend that the current law be reviewed. The law should clearly include the responsibilities of all relevant actors in public and private institutions (in particular policies for the functioning of the PD process as an essential resource for human capital development - to be regulated by specific Administrative Instructions). In any case, it is necessary to have a strategy drafted that aims to identify the needs of educators for professional development by areas, which is also a requirement from the Strategic Framework for PD and the Administrative Instruction on licensing.
- A cooperative network of pre-schools, central level and training providers should be created to develop policies within pre-schools, to revise the list of accredited training programs and to define adequate criteria based on educators' needs.
- Accordingly, training providers should be selected based on educators' needs, and school management should draft regulations that comply with the requirements from the Strategic Framework for PD and Administrative Instruction No. 5/2017 on the Licensing System and Career Teacher Development and by providing ongoing training.
- It will be indispensable to have standards and policies developed that would regulate the operation and supervision of the work of private institutions and strengthen accountability.
- The PD process in institutions should be monitored by the Education Inspectorate, who would be able to identify the deficiencies and needs of the staff, in order for the issues to be addressed to policymakers.

Consequently, in the future some further studies could be conducted on best practices to ensure educators' success and on design and implementation of educational policies towards the needs of early childhood educators. Otherwise, longitudinal studies could be used to observe the performance of the educators after a period of attending professional development activities. Furthermore in the current study, a lack of cooperation is identified between central institutions and preschools, so future studies could explain reasons behind the lack of such cooperation.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire for educators

Dear educators,

This survey aims to achieve results through a scientific research.

The objective of the questionnaire is to assess your perception regarding your own experience as educators and your professional development when working with children. The questionnaire will take approximately five minutes to complete, since it contains 13 questions in total. For the majority of the questions, you have to select one response; for some of the questions, you can select more than one response; for other questions, you are required to write a response on your own.

Your responses will help us derive actual results that positively contribute to the understanding of child development. We assure you that the responses will remain anonymous and entirely confidential.

If you have any questions or you want to have access to the results of the survey, contact us through:

Mob. +383 44 199 348 or +383 49 500 347

Email: arberore.bicaj@gmail.com or violeta.buza@universitetiiaab.com

General information

1. Name of the institution where you work: _____
2. Municipality: _____
3. The institution where you work is:
 - a. A public pre-school institution
 - b. A private pre-school institution
4. Gender: M F
5. Age: a. 25 - 30 b. 31 - 40 c. 41 - 50 d. 51 - 65

Background information

6. Are you a teacher of children whose age is (mark all that apply):
 - 1 - 2 yr old _____
 - 2 - 3 yr old _____
 - 4 - 5 yr old _____
 - 5 - 6 yrs old _____
7. How many years have you worked in early childhood education institutions? _____ yrs.
8. What is your highest education level?
 - a. HPS (Higher Pedagogical School)/the department for educators
 - b. University of Education/pre-school department
 - c. Master
 - d. Psychology
 - e. Pedagogy
 - f. Albanian language and Literature
 - d. Care and well-being (at a private university)
 - e. Other _____ (please specify)
9. How many professional development trainings on any topic related to early childhood education have you had in your career?
 _____ (state the total number of trainings)
10. How many hours of professional development (trainings) have you had during the last 12 months? _____ (write the exact number of training hours)
11. On a scale of 1 to 10, please rank how effective the Professional Development Programs were in improving your teaching skills.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not effective			Somewhat effective				Very effective		

12. On a scale of 1 to 10, please rank how effective was the knowledge gained from these professional development programs in helping you improve your classroom teaching.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not Effective Somewhat effective Very effective

13. How much do you agree with the following statement, from 1 to 10? The professional development programs helped me to make changes in my classroom to improve the quality of teaching.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Strongly disagree Neutral Strongly agree

Attitudes

14. How interested are you in professional development while working?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not interested Somewhat interested Very interested

15. If your response to item 3 was "Somewhat effective" or "Very effective", is your interest to improve (please mark all that apply):

- Your knowledge and skills ____
- Change the learning environment in your classroom ____
- Improve the learning activities for children in your room ____
- Align with early childhood learning standards ____
- Pursue accreditation ____
- Participate in a quality improvement program ____
- Do it for myself ____
- Show my family what I can do ____

16. If you are interested in participating in a professional development program (trainings), are there opportunities for you to attend trainings?

Yes ____ No ____ Don't know ____

17. What other opportunities are offered to you for professional development? (Mark all that apply)

- In-house professional development
- Mentoring
- Teacher as a researcher
- None of the above
- Other, please specify _____

Knowledge and skills (educator performance/quality)

18. How would you rate your level of preparation (as an educator) when working with children?

- 1 – Not at all prepared
- 2 – Somewhat not prepared
- 3 – Neither prepared or not prepared
- 4 – Enough prepared
- 5 – Very prepared

19. How would you rate your performance in classroom regarding your teaching skills?

- 1 – Very poor
- 2 – Below average
- 3 – Average
- 4 – Above average
- 5 – Excellent

20. How would you rate the following activities used in the classroom, in improving your performance at the classroom? (1 “no impact at all” to 5 “high impact”, or 88 – do not apply that in the classroom)

Activities that allow the child to explore _____

The child can raise questions that will cause me to change my teaching activities _____

The child can select activities _____

Individual interest _____

Play based learning _____

Learning through interaction with adults and children _____

As a teacher you direct all the activities _____

Allow for the child to have experiences that occur at different times and with different activities _____

Whole group activities mixed with small group and individual instruction _____

Whole group activities for the majority of the day _____

21. Which document do you rely on for planning and organizing the activities with children?

- a. Pre-school education standards
- b. Pre-school education curricula (2016)
- c. Both of them
- d. Neither of them

Thank you for your time. We appreciate it!

Appendix 2: Interview guide for directors of pre-school institutions

Dear Directors,

First of all, we want to thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview. It is very important for us to have you here and hear your opinion on our topic.

This research aims to identify the importance of educators' professional development in their performance at pre-school institutions in Kosovo, according to standards of Pre-

school Education. The interview with you will serve as a complementary part of the survey that was conducted beforehand with a sample of educators in pre-schools.

Although you will be free to express your opinions related to the topic, this interview will be based on a few standard question, in order for the discussion to be properly guided. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes and your responses will remain confidential and anonymous.

1. What are the purposes for using the *General standards of Pre-school Education in Kosovo (3-6 years)* document?
2. Point 5 of the standards document emphasises the development/qualification of educational staff. Do you have a (development) plan which offers an opportunity for educators for further professional development, based on this standard (point 5)?
3. If yes, how many hours of training annually are foreseen for educators, based on your plan?
4. Do you believe that activities for continuous professional development have improved the educators' performance and have influenced the increase in the quality of the educational process, as highlighted in point 5.C.1 in the standards document?
5. If yes, how did you observe/evaluate the educators' performance?
 - (a) What kind of instruments did you use, if any?
 - (b) To whom do you report the performance of each educator?

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