

Exploring the Preschool Teachers' Views on Professionalism, Quality of Education and Sustainability: International Study in Estonia and Turkey

Marika Veisson

Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia

Abdülkadir Kabaday

Necmettin Erbakan University, Konya, Turkey

Abstract

Since education is a dynamic process and open to contemporary changes, professionalism which is vitally important for the sustainability of teacher education, has gained importance. Recent studies have emphasised the relations between professionalism and quality of teacher education and sustainability. The aim of the current study was to interview preschool teachers and to explore their views and understandings about professionalism, quality of preschool education, and sustainability in Estonian and Turkish cultural contexts. In this study, qualitative research methods were used to analyse the data obtained from the participants. Fifteen preschool teachers from Estonia and 36 preschool teachers currently working in different parts of Turkey participated in the study. They were asked to respond to 15 open-ended questions about professionalism and quality of teacher education and sustainability. Content analysis techniques were used for coding, finding the themes, arranging the sub-themes for interpreting the data obtained. Some suggestions are made to the teachers and educational policy makers related to the research findings.

Keywords: professionalism, quality of teacher education, sustainability, preschool teachers.

Introduction

Since the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD; 2005–2014) began, the promotion of ESD has been highlighted as a necessity and therefore more emphasis is being placed on this within the higher education curriculum. Sustainable development is believed to consist of three dimensions: the protection of the natural environment, the maintenance of economic vitality, and the observance of specific social considerations. To raise the awareness of sustainable development in the

society it is necessary for teachers to understand concepts such as quality of education and professionalism, which are directly related to ESD. Moreover, it is important that different disciplines engage with this initiative. This poses the question what exactly teachers know about the relations of the concepts with sustainable development and whether this varies in diverse cultural contexts.

The current article is part of a wider international study where early childhood teachers from eight countries have been interviewed about their understandings of professionalism, quality of early childhood education and sustainability, and relationships between all these concepts. In this article we give an overview of the results in Estonia and Turkey. The purpose of this study was to find out how teachers in Estonia and Turkey understand professionalism, quality and sustainability and to answer the following research questions:

What is professionalism in early childhood education?

What is quality in early childhood education and how is it related to teachers' professionalism?

How do teachers understand sustainability in early childhood education and how is it related to professionalism and quality in early childhood education?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is based on the ideas of Goodson (2013) and the representatives of the critical ecology paradigm (Urban, 2010), according to which *professionalism* and its discourses and practices could link (global) macro and (local) micro systems, allowing for local and diverse practices and experiences to inform the professional knowledge in democratic practice-based evidence. According to Urban (2010), *professionalism* may be viewed as a focus on relationships within a complex ecology of the profession, space for dialogue and critical questions which value diversity and focus on the Freireian notion of hope. According to Carmen Dally research findings, there are three themes in *professionalism* of a preschool teacher: a distinct pedagogical style, specialist knowledge and practices, and an early childhood professional were also identified (Dalli, 2010). Professionals engage in a process of constructing new knowledge and applying it to practice. Understanding the complexity of professional knowledge and practice is an important step for all practitioners wishing to improve the quality of their practice (Dayan, 2010). Formal qualification requirements for preschool teachers have increased around the world. University-based initial teacher education, research-based professional practice and high-quality in-service training are regarded as essential ingredients of high-level teacher qualification. Altogether this tendency is considered as part of the political, professional and public movement to enhance preschool teachers' *professionalism*.

Research can make a positive contribution to each aspect of teachers' professional knowledge: practical wisdom, technical knowledge and critical reflection (Winch, Orchard, & Oancea, 2015). Pupala, Kascak, and Tesar (2016) analyzed everyday preschool practices in Slovakia in terms of tensions between policies, the teachers' workforce and the concept of professionalism. Teachers are decreasingly focused on the actual work with the children and are concerned instead with notions of accountability and reporting, which supposedly raises their professional status. Slovakia's experience

of the bureaucratic subjectivities of early year's teachers has complex ramifications for European and overseas countries as it problematizes and unmasks the global issues of complex tensions between the teachers and policy documents. Löfgren and Håkan (2017) reported that teachers frequently refer to a "preschool-kind of learning" that departs from children's interests about documentation. This stands out as a professional strategy that allows teachers to deal with contradictory policies about what should be documented. In their talk about how to conduct documentation, the teachers put themselves as learners. This is a way of "doing professionalism" that allows teachers to deal with demands for accountability in a way that also allows for professional agency. Kim (2013) explores how female teachers construct their occupational identities as teachers within early childhood education (ECE) settings.

The combination of feminist scholarship and the use of teacher life history method allow these women to describe themselves as professionally trained and educated teachers who love teaching and children even though they are suffering from low pay and a generalized social image so much that preschool teachers are just considered as "baby-sitters." These female teachers exhibited unique concept of professionalism: passion, dedication, and commitment to ECE field. Chang-Kredl (2017) examines the claim that teachers' subjective experiences can lead to social change through the perspective of the early year's teacher in Quebec. Fourteen early childhood teachers participated in memory writing and individual interviews. Data were inductively coded and analyzed in terms of the teachers' subjective experiences of: (1) their occupational image, (2) their day-to-day work in early childhood settings, and (3) their constructions of childhood. Analysis revealed a closer understanding of the interplay between the teacher's internal and external experiences, particularly in terms of childhood as a discursive concept, gendered assumptions about professionalism, and psychoanalytic notions of individuation. The study suggests that change will require that early years teachers develop and articulate their understandings of their subjective experiences in ways that simultaneously expose deeply entrenched assumptions in the social unconscious that deny recognition to educators whose work relies on their accessibility to the youngest children. Monk and Phillipson (2017) revealed that the educators' perspectives of professionalism and professionalization related to their work-life roles, their cultural understandings and relationships, and how they believed they were viewed by others in relation to the status of early childhood education. Harwood and Tukonic (2016) showed that all the educators held a strong self-perception of professionalism regardless of their level of education, reporting high levels of job satisfaction, competence, recognition as a professional from others, and self-recognition as a professional. Participants' notions of professionalism focused on the qualities of an individual considered a professional (e.g., good listener, patient, and understanding. Clasen and Jensen de López (2017) suggest that after the implementation (1) early educators report having changed their shared book reading practices, taken ownership of the programme and successfully integrated it into current practices, (2) the early literacy programme has supported early educators in their professional development and (3) early educators see the early literacy programme as a tool for improving social inclusion among children in day-care centers. Based on the results we conclude that reflecting on current practices, the development of a new professionalism and taking ownership are crucial processes in changing practices and in the successful implementation of new programmes. The study of Mikser, Tuul, Veisson

and Goodson (1918) indicate that during the professional career of most teachers, demands have increased and teaching has become more difficult. In the opinion of the respondents this is caused by changes in educational life as well as in the society as a whole. However, most teachers also think that teacher's freedom to make decisions about the content and the results of one's work have also increased.

Quality in early childhood education includes most often education on the use of a curriculum, staff characteristics, teacher behaviors and practices, and the staff-child interactions. *Quality* in most countries involves structural features of the settings (space, group size and other standards (OECD, 2012; OECD, 2015; OECD, 2017). According to Öun (2009), *quality* is higher in childcare institutions that apply a child-centered approach, and a study by Öun et al. (2014) showed that the indicators of the quality of the learning environment differed in different preschool groups, whereas spatial conditions of the groups had an impact on several factors.

There are two different definitions of education for *sustainable development* (ESD): 1) as a threefold approach to education, based on questions concerning education about, in, and for the environment 2) Second, as an approach to education that includes four interrelated dimensions – economic, social, environmental, and cultural. The first area relates to how teachers understand ESD, while the second area focuses on how ESD can be implemented in educational practice (Hedefalk, Almquist, & Östman, 2015). According to a study by Ritchie (2012), there have been programs within early childhood care and education settings that offer Maori perspectives on caring for ourselves, others, and the environment. Research in Australia (Dyment et al., 2014) has shown that participants widened their understandings of Early Childhood Education for Sustainability (ECEFS) from a narrow environmental focus to a broader understanding of the social, political and economic dimensions. They also found that Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) educators are well placed to engage with Education for Sustainability (EfS) more readily than might educators in other education sectors. According to Pipere, Veisson and Salite (2015) and Wals (2013), one of the issues connected with this field is that most of the universities that engage in *sustainability* are universities that have a focus on education rather than on research. Strong research universities tend to pay less attention to both ESD and sustainability in general (Wals, 2013). The aspiration of sustainable development requires us to resolve common problems and tensions and to recognize new horizons. Economic growth and the creation of wealth have reduced global poverty rates, but vulnerability, inequality, exclusion and violence have increased within and across societies throughout the world. Unsustainable patterns of economic production and consumption contribute to global warming, environmental degradation and an upsurge in natural disasters (UNESCO, 2015, p. 9). Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is thus described as a model of education that aims to enable learners to constructively and creatively address present and future global challenges and create more sustainable and resilient societies (UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Project, 2016, p. 494). Recognition of our planet as a finite ecosystem, however, results in a “definition of sustainable development constructed from an eco-centric worldview” which serves as a “pathway to a future where environmental, social and economic growth” are recognized as being synergistic (Holdsworth, Thomas, & Hegarty, 2013, p. 352). In addition to ecological/environmental sustainability, considerations of cultural, social, economic and political sustainability refer to the maintenance of diverse cultures

and the languages and identities of their members, to wellbeing and quality of life, justice, citizenship, peace and participation. It is also salient to observe that both cultural diversity and biodiversity are being simultaneously and seriously diminished by destructive development forces (Gorenflo et al., 2012).

Method

Participants

Fifteen preschool teachers from Estonia and 36 teachers from Turkey participated in this study. In Turkey, mean age was 32 years. Work experience of teachers in Turkey was 2-23 years. All teachers from different day care centers were women. Work experience in Estonia was 3-38 years. All teachers participated voluntarily and signed written contract with research ethical considerations regulated by the Ministry of Education.

Procedure

Semi-structured interview was used. Interview questions were divided into three blocks: questions about *professionalism, quality and sustainability*. In this study, qualitative method was used to aggregate the data handled. Common data collection methods used in qualitative research is focus groups, triads, dyads, in-depth interviews, etc. (Mora, 2010). One of the important strategies to collect the data is to question participants directly about their experience (semi-structured *interviews*). The common instruments used to collect data are interview and observation (Russell & Gregory, 2003).

Seventy five percent of the Estonian teachers in this study had at least Bachelor education and 25% of teachers had higher professional education from a pedagogical school and they worked in Estonian day care centers. Since 2013 all preschool teachers in Estonia must have at least Bachelor education (level 6). The principles for learning and teaching activities are formulated in the Estonian National Curriculum for Preschool Child Care Institutions (Government of the Republic, 2008). Day care centers were chosen from different counties all over Estonia, a third of them from rural day care centers. In Estonia children participate in day care from age 1.5 to 7. Seven-year-old children go to school. In younger children groups (age 1.5–3) there are usually 14–16 children, in older children groups (age 3–7) 18–24 children. Children-adult ratio in the younger children group is 1:8 and in older group 1:12.

The average interview time in Estonia was 63 minutes, shortest interview lasted 41:36 and longest 1:47:40. All interviews were read and transcribed by two researchers and categories were created. We received 128 pages of transcribed interviews. Research was anonymous. All teachers participated voluntarily and signed a written consent form after reading the information sheet and having been briefed on the ethical considerations.

In the Turkish National educational system, while day care centers accept 0–3 years-old children, the preschool institutions admit 4-6 years-old children for education. In Turkey, preschool institutions are mostly female-dominant and comprise 93% female and 7% male preschool teachers, which is very common in studies worldwide (Kabadayi, 2010). There are 1,326,000 preschool children and 77,150 preschool teachers in Turkey

with nearly 19 preschoolers per preschool teacher (<http://egitimsen.org.tr>). The 2006 preschool teaching program was updated and changed in 2013. The preschool teachers are still teaching by taking reference of 2013 preschool teaching program under the auspice of Turkish Ministry of National Education (MNE) (<http://tegm.meb.gov.tr>).

In this study, 36 preschool teachers currently working in different parts of Turkey participated. 36 participants responded to open-ended questions comprising demographic and research questions. 27 of the teachers had Bachelor and 9 Master of Arts degrees. Twenty one of the participants were 25–29, 10 of them 30, and 5 were 35 years old or older. Twenty five of the participants had 1–9 years' work experience and 11 of them had more than 10 years working experience. All of the participants together had 719 preschool children whose age ranged from 3 to 6-years-old. Interviews were organized in native languages and translated into English by the researcher in Turkey. All interviews were recorded. Authors of this study transcribed all interviews and translated them into English. Authors of the study and their students transcribed and coded the answers. All interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed by two researchers.

The following questions were addressed to define the professionalism, quality of preschool education and sustainability, and the participating teachers were asked to respond to them as interview question prompts:

If you could choose a profession today, would it be early childhood teacher/educator again or something else?

What does professionalism of preschool teacher/educator mean for you? Please describe.

What are your strengths?

Do you also have some weaknesses as a preschool teacher and how would you like to develop yourself in that area?

What requirements are there for becoming a professional preschool teacher?

What does quality of education in preschool childcare institution mean for you? Please describe.

How in your opinion are professionalism and quality of education related to each other?

What does sustainability of education in the early childhood education context mean for you?

How is professionalism of teachers related to education for sustainability in your opinion?

Data Analysis

Thematic interpretation of the data was used to analysis the interviews. Categories were developed, and each question was subjected to the content analysis technique. Answers were analyzed and scrutinized under certain categories. The opinions of the participants were classified, and the results of the research were marked as explained in the following section.

Results

In this part, the data handled through the open-ended questions are analyzed and the explanations of open-ended questions are provided.

Participants' Reasons for Becoming a Preschool Teacher

Most of the participants prefer to become preschool teachers as they like children and teaching them. Few of them chose to become preschool teachers due to the result of the university entrance exam and its employment facilities. In general, 69% of the participants in Turkey and 87% in Estonia chose the teaching profession intrinsically, while only 17% of them opted for it for external reasons in Turkey and 13% in Estonia.

Participants' Opinion about Choosing the Profession

Sixty seven percent of the participants in Turkey and 80% in Estonia stated that they would choose the same profession again if they had the chance, while others would choose different jobs than teaching.

Participants' Opinion about Professionalism of Preschool Teacher

Turkish participants have a balanced distribution about the meaning of the professionalism from the most to the least and explained the meaning of the professionalism under the different categories as *being experienced*, *having interaction with children and pedagogic knowledge* and *being problem solvers*. For the teachers to be professionals 13 participants suggested that the teachers should be *experienced*; 11 participants put forward that the teachers should have *good communication and interaction with children*; 8 of them said that the teachers should have *effective pedagogical knowledge*, and 4 of them stated that the teachers should *be problem solvers*.

For the participants, the preschool teachers have to be really well-prepared and interested about everything and think in complex ways.

Estonian teachers' opinions about professionalism can be scrutinized in different categories: *education and knowledge*, *values*, *curriculum*, *child centered education*, *competent in child development*, *children with special needs*, *problem solving skills*.

For *education*, *knowledge and skills in specialty*, and *innovation*, it is important for teachers to follow changes, courses in specialty (Teacher T25, T26, T27, T28, T30, T34 T35, T36, T37), reading scientific pedagogical literature (T21, T22, T36), self-education (T21, T27) self-analyzing skills (T28). The professional competences, adaptation of the modern education methods are also important. Practical skills, how to cope in different situations is also important (T35). Another important point is planning skills, planning the week activities (T22, T27). Teachers would share their knowledge and experience with the parents.

Values as independence, professional development, awareness about rights, commitments and responsibilities, trust, agreements, thankfulness, consideration, empathy, friendliness are emphasized (T27, T30, T31, T35, T36, T37). Teacher should work with children, love children and respect them, understand children, and be able to organize work with children in a group (T18, T21, T27, T30, T31, T32). Teachers also need to care about the children and about their life. Empathy and emotional side of the teachers are also important.

Following national curriculum that gives quite a lot of freedom to the teachers, since they themselves can decide what and how to organize their work (T22, T28, T30, T35, T36, T37). However, some teachers found that young teachers need a more detailed curriculum (T35).

Many preferred a child centered education and child centered learning activities (T18, T22, T31, T34, T36, T37); during the Soviet time, education was more teacher centered (T36).

Teacher should be creative and have good *problem solving skills* (T18, T22, T23, T32).

Teacher should be *competent in child development* and fill the school readiness card (T21, T34, T35, T35, T37). Teacher should be competent in development conversation (T21, T34, T35, T35). Some children have a lack of concentration skills, lack of listening skills, lack of behavioral culture, discipline in day care and teachers should cope with all of them (T28, T29, T31, T36). Teachers should have good ICT skills (T18, T28, T29), and integrated activities are very fruitful (T18, T27, T36).

Teachers should have skills to work with *children with special needs* and coping with children with special needs (T21, T27, T32). Learning through play is also very important (T28, T29). Teachers should like natural sciences, activities in the forest, park, near the sea and river (T25, T26). Professional teacher is also flexible and authoritative (T37).

Participants' Opinion about Their Strengths in Teaching

Turkish participants stated that they had *sympathy on the children, patience in hard times, and a good interaction with children* and an ability to *guide* them and to be *authoritative and experienced* in this order as their strong sides during teaching.

Estonian teachers mentioned the following strengths in their work: music education, baby schools, preparing children for school (T18, T19, T21, T25, T27), individual work with children (T25, T26, T30, T31), understanding children's development (T32, T34, T37), communication with children and parents, listening children (T35, T36, T37), creativity (T22, T32), reading and writing, children's books, reading games (T22, T33), group work, team work (T33, T37), discipline (T28, T29), physical education (T18), work with gifted children (T23) and children with special needs (T35), partnership with parents (T34), environmental education (T27).

Participants' Opinion about Their Weaknesses in Teaching

Turkish participants explained that they were irritated, impatient, emotional, unplanned, and unable to be authoritative in this order as their weak sides of their teaching.

The weaknesses mentioned by Estonian teachers are the following: working with children with behavior problems, children with special needs (T21, T31, T33), lack of teacher-parent partnerships (T23, T34), mathematics activities (T22), art activities (T36), documentation (T30), and ICT skills (T37).

Participants' Opinion about Quality of Education in Preschool Childcare Institution

For 44% of the Turkish participants, quality of education means physical conditions and equipment of the institutions, for 28% it means experienced staff of the institutions, and institution's supporting children and teacher development.

Estonian participants stated that important categories are teachers' education, partnership with school, learning environment, values and value education and communi-

cation skills as follows: pedagogical education of teachers, theoretical knowledge, lifelong learning, play based learning (T18, T21, T27, T28, T29, T34, T35, T37). It is valid for kindergarten and school, partnership with school, school readiness of children (T28, T29, T19, T25, T26, T27, T30, T32). Better professionalism skills are needed to create good learning environment (T27, T30 T36, T37). Creating best learning environment gives education with good quality (T21, T22, T27, T37), values like helping behaviour, social development, trust, benevolence, empathy are necessary (T21, T23, T31, T32), teachers should have good communication skills (T19, T30, T32, T34). Teacher should have wide horizons (T23). Children need recognition and friendliness (T18). Creativity is very important (T23). Partnership with parents is necessary (T35).

Participants' Opinion about the Relation between Professionalism and Quality of Education

Seventy eight percent of the Turkish participants explained the relation between professionalism and quality of education as “complementary of each other”; 14% explained it as “*proficiency and experience of teacher in education, and the teachers' and administrative staffs' collaboration, experienced staff, the institutions being full of love, the institutions supporting development of the children, the institutions supporting the teachers' success* in this order.

Estonian teachers' opinions about the relation between professionalism and quality of education were as follows: professional teacher is opened to new experiences and gives the best quality (T19, T22, T31, T35, T36). Professional teacher is child centred and individual work with every child gives good quality (T18), lifelong learning is vital for teachers. Teacher's task is to offer interesting activities and possibilities to have best quality in teaching (T21), how well s/he works. Value education and creativity in teacher's work are important (T23), through teacher's knowledge and skills we shall reach to the best quality. Learning through play is important (T25 and 26), professional teacher is able to create good learning environment to have quality education in preschool and child care institutions (T30), teacher should understand the situation and start from human perspective (T32), teachers' internal feeling how to do things is important (T33), child development is the most important result in their work. Partnership with colleagues and parents is also very important (T34).

Participants' Opinion about the Relation between Professionalism and Sustainability

Eighty-six percent of the Turkish participants explained the relation between professionalism and sustainability as “*complementary of each other*”; 14% of them explained it as “*the parents' involvement in education*”. Estonian teachers mention the following: professional teacher knows how to use resources in the best way, environmental sustainability, respecting the forest, sea, lake, river, park, animals, birds, and plants, cultural sustainability is also vital. Estonian language and culture are most important. Individual development of children is important (T25, T26). Erasmus and Comenius projects give best possibilities to be professional and sustainable (T30). Offering professional support to parents and parents' trust and partnership with colleagues (T35, T36), professional teacher knows what sustainability is (T35, T36, T38).

Participants' Opinion about the Meaning of Sustainability of Education in the Early Childhood Education Context

All of the participants in Turkey stated that *sustainability of education means the continuation of learning about the teaching process in the institutions* while sustainability means continuation of day care centres. Estonian teachers referred to the economic sustainability, environmental sustainability, cultural environment and national culture in this order.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, preschool teachers' understandings and knowledge about professionalism, quality of preschool education and sustainability in Estonian and Turkish cultural contexts was analysed. These are the contemporary concepts every teacher should assimilate in order to be the active change agent and to encourage changes towards sustainable development when they go to school as teachers.

The result of the study put forward that the participants were intrinsically motivated with their job; and they admitted they had some strong and weak sides in their teaching profession. It was also seen that they had a lack of defining the terms of professionalism, quality of preschool education and sustainability. For example, they defined professionalism in teaching in an ego-centric way, mostly the proficiency of the teachers in action rather than a comprehensive definition including teaching learning processes, parents, environmental conditions, school atmosphere, needs of the students and the society etc. According to reports commissioned by the European Commission (2011) and OECD (2012), the professionalism of preschool teachers is a key factor in ensuring the quality of early childhood education. Studies by Peterson et al. (2016; 2014), that were based on the contextual approach in the bio-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner 2005) and critical ecology theory of early childhood professionalism (Urban, 2010), have looked at preschool teachers' professionalism in interaction. Chen, Martin, and Erdosi-Mehaffey (2017) found that it is more important than ever that stakeholders develop effective development mechanisms to professionalize the practitioners with knowledge, skills and dispositions to work competently with children to ultimately benefit their learning and development. According to Oberhuemer (2015), two parallel discourses relate to the dynamic expansion of provision of Germany in recent years, to the enhancement of the quality of early childhood centres across the country, and to supporting ECEC settings to work with the challenges of social inequalities more effectively.

Most of the participants in Turkey defined the quality of education as the physical and the quality conditions of the school rather than the quality of the students they would train. In Estonia most important categories were teachers' education, school's partnership with day care centres, learning environment, values and value education and communication skills. The participants should be equipped with the necessary knowledge and prerequisite skills to apply the concepts in question as they are the very important pillars of the development to adjust to the advancement in the World. Duhn, Fleer, Harrison (2016) wrote that it is important to support collaboration between government, early year professionals and communities to work holistically in the best interest of all children and their families. According to Öun (2009), quality is higher in childcare institutions that apply a child-centred approach, and a study by Öun et al. (2014) showed

that the indicators of the quality of the learning environment differed in different preschool groups, whereas spatial conditions of the groups had an impact on several factors.

High quality ECEC is based on high expectations, and requires: Access to ECEC, the ECEC workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation (European Commission, 2014, pp. 10–12). Workman and Ullrich (2017) contented that, for quality early childhood education, there are important professional and stable teacher workforce, effective leadership, age-appropriate curriculum, comprehensive family engagement activities, multilevel continuous quality improvement system, and a sustainable set of funding mechanisms. UNESCO (2014) underlines a growing international recognition of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as an integral element of quality education and a key enabler for sustainable development.

Estonian teachers pointed out in the interviews that cultural sustainability is most important because Estonia is very small country and this is a reason why we must keep our culture and language. Year 2019 is a year of Estonian as native language. Very important is also to protect Estonian nature. In 2018, there was a hot discussion about the protection of forests and ideas to build new cellulose factory. Forest protectors won this battle. Last years have been economically successful. Mean salaries grow very quickly, but we have not workforce enough. We must think more about efficiency of work.

Turkish participants defined the term sustainable education as the continuation of teaching learning processes though sustainable development 'is an education that develops critical thinking skills, broad and integrated contextual knowledge and the desire and capacity to apply that knowledge and to provide ways of increasing student's skills for ESD (Sherren, 2008). It was also deduced that the participants had lack of relating between professionalism and quality of education and ESD as they defined them as the complementary of each other, or the parents' involvement in the teaching learning process. It seems that they could not make an effective relationship among the professionalism, quality of education and ESD as they had just a surface meaning of the concepts.

Acknowledgements

The study is a part of the research project launched in Estonia and led by Ivor Goodson; IUT18-2 "Teachers' professionalism and professionalism in changing context (1.01.2014–31.12.2019)", Ivor Goodson, Tallinn University, School of Educational Sciences.

References

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Chang-Kredl, S. (2017). A "Politics against Social Submission": Of early years teachers' accessibility and work with children in Québec. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development*, 37(2), 202–216.
- Chen, J. J., Martin, A., & Erdosi-Mehaffey, V. (2017). The process and impact of the infant/toddler credential as professional development: Reflections from multiple perspectives and recommendations for policy. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 45, 359–368.

- Clasen, L. E., & Jensen de López, K. (2017). BookFun – “There’s more to it than reading a book” – implementing a Danish early literacy programme that supports professionalism, language development and social inclusion. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 17(2), 254–279.
- Dalli, C. (2010). Pedagogy, knowledge and collaboration: Towards a ground-up perspective on professionalism. In C. Dalli & M. Urban (Eds.), *Professionalism in early childhood and care: International perspectives*. USA and Canada: Routledge.
- Dayan, J. (2010). Towards professionalism in early childhood practicum supervision – a personal journey. In C. Dalli & M. Urban (Eds.), *Professionalism in early childhood education and care. International perspectives* (pp. 22–40). New York: Routledge.
- Duhn, I., Fler, M., & Harrison, L. (2016). Supporting multidisciplinary networks through relationality and a critical sense of belonging: Three ‘gardening tools’ and the Relational Agency Framework. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 24(3), 378–391.
- Dymont, J. E., Davis, J. M., & Nailon, D. (2014). The impact of professional development on early childhood educators’ confidence, understanding and knowledge of education for sustainability. *Environmental Education Research*, 20(5), 660–679.
- European Commission. (2011). Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow. *Communication from the commission* 17.02.2011. Brussels.
- European Commission. (2014). Proposal for key principles of a quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care. Report of the working group on Early Childhood Education and Care under the auspices of the European Commission. Brussels.
- Goodson, I. F. (2013). *Developing narrative Theory. Life histories and personal representations*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor Francis Group.
- Gorenflo, L. J., Romaine, S., Mittermeier, R. A., & Walker-Painemilla, K. (2012). Co-occurrence of linguistic and biological diversity in biodiversity hotspots and high biodiversity wilderness areas. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 109(21), 8032–8037. Retrieved from <http://www.pnas.org/content/8109/8021/8032>
- Government of the Republic. (2008). Estonian National Curriculum for Pre-school Child Care Institutions. *Riigi Teataja I*, 23, 152.
- Harwood, D., & Tukonic, S. (2016). Babysitter or professional perceptions of professionalism narrated by Ontario early childhood educators. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 8(4), 589–600.
- Hedefalk, M., Almquist, J., & Östman, L. (2015). Education for sustainable development in early childhood education: review of the research literature. *Environmental Education Research*, 21(7), 975–990.
- Holdsworth, S., Thomas, I., & Hegarty, K. (2013). Sustainability education. Theory and practice. In R. B. Stevenson, M. Brody, J. Dillon, & A. E. J. Wals (Eds.), *Research on environmental education* (pp. 349–358). New York: AERA/Routledge.
- Kabaday, A. (2010). Investigating demographic characteristics and teaching perceptions of Turkish preschool teachers. *Early Child Development and Care*, 180(6), 809–822.
- Kim, M. (2013). Constructing occupational identities: How female preschool teachers develop professionalism. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 1(4), 309–317.

- Löfgren, H. (2017). Learning in preschool: Teachers' talk about their work with documentation in Swedish preschools. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 15(2), 130–143.
- Mikser, R., Tuul, M., Veisson, M., & Goodson, I. (1918). The place and theory and practice in preschool teachers' pre-service education. In C. Pascal, T. Bertram, & M. Veisson (Eds.). *Early Childhood Education and Change in Diverse Cultural Contexts* (pp. 118–136). Routledge.
- Monk, H., & Phillipson, S. (2017). Early childhood educators' experiences and perceptions of professionalism and professionalisation in the Asian context. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 45(1), 3–22.
- Mora, M. (2010). Quantitative vs. qualitative research – When to use which. Retrieved from <http://www.surveygizmo.com/survey-blog/quantitative-qualitative-research>
- Nichols, S., & Cormack, P. (2016). Impactful practitioner inquiry: The ripple effect on classrooms, schools, and teacher professionalism. *Practitioner Inquiry Series*. Teachers College Press. 192 pp.
- Oberhuemer, P. (2015). Parallel discourses with unparalleled effects: Early years workforce development and professionalization initiatives in Germany. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 23(3), 303–312.
- OECD. (2012). *Starting Strong III: Policy toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (2015). “Estonia”, in Education at Glance 2015: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-53-en>
- OECD. (2016). Encouraging quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), Research brief: Working conditions matter. <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/49322250.pdf> (last accessed September 2016).
- OECD. (2017). Starting Strong 2017. Key OECD indicators on early childhood education and care. www.oecd.org/education/starting-strong-2017-9789264276116-en.htm
- Peterson, T., Veisson, M., Hujala, E., Härkönen, U., Sandberg, A., Johansson, I., & Kovacsne Bakosi, E. (2016). Professionalism of preschool teachers in Estonia, Sweden, Finland and Hungary. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 24(3), 136–156.
- Peterson, T., Veisson, M., Hujala, E., Sandberg, A., & Johansson, I. (2014). The influence of leadership on the professionalism of preschool teachers in Estonia, Sweden and Finland. In A. Liimets ja M. Veisson (Eds.), *Teachers and Youth in Educational Reality* (pp.119–142). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag. (Baltische Studien zur Erziehungs- und Sozialwissenschaft; 27.)
- Pipere, A., Veisson, M., & Salite, I. (2015). Developing research in teacher education for sustainability: UN DESD with the Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability. *Teacher Education for Sustainability*, 17(2), 5–43.
- Pupala, B., Kascak, O., & Tesar, M. (2016). Learning how to do up buttons: Professionalism, teacher identity and bureaucratic subjectivities in early years settings. *Policy Futures in Education*, 14(6), 655–665.
- Russell C. K., & Gregory D. M. (2003). Evaluation of qualitative research studies. *Evidence Based Nursing*, 6(2), 36–40.
- Sherren, K. (2008). A history of the future of higher education for sustainable development. *Environmental Education Research*, 14(3), 238–256.

- UNESCO. (2015). Rethinking education: Towards a global common good? www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/rethinking-education/
- UNESCO. (2014). Roadmap for implementing the global action programme on education for sustainable development. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002305/230514e.pdf>
- UNESCO. (2014). *Roadmap for implementing the global action programme in education for sustainable development*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Project. (2016). Education for people and planet: Creating sustainable futures for all. Retrieved from unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002457/245752e.pdf
- Urban, M. (2010). Dealing with uncertainty: Challenges and possibilities for the early childhood profession. In C. Dalli & M. Urban. (Eds.), *Professionalism in Early Childhood Education and Care. International perspectives* (pp. 4–22). New York: Routledge.
- Wals, A. E. J. (2013). Sustainability in higher education in the context of the UN DESD: A review of learning and institutionalization processes. *Journal of Cleaner Production*. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2013.06.007> Retrieved June, 12, 2015.
- Winch, C., Orchard, A., & Oancea, J. (2015). The contribution of educational research to teachers' professional learning: Philosophical understandings. *Oxford Review of Education*, 41(2), 202–216.
- Õun, T. (2009). Quality of environments in Estonian preschools. *Problems in Education in the 21st Century*, 4, 39–45.
- Õun, T., Nugin, K., Veisson, M., Tuul, M., & Leppik, T. (2014). The quality of the learning environment in Estonian preschools. In A. Liimets & M. Veisson (Eds.), *Teachers and Youth in Educational Reality* (pp.103–119). Peter Lang.
- Workman, S., & Ullrich, R. (2017). Quality 101: Identifying the core components of a high-quality early childhood program. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2017/02/13/414939>. Posted on February 13, 2017.

Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Marika Veisson, Narva Road 25, Tallinn University 10120, Estonia. Email: veissonm@tlu.ee