PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS VIA DISTANCE EDUCATION: THE CASE OF NON-THESIS MASTER'S PROGRAM IN INNOVATIVE EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study is to examine the opinions of the teachers studying in the Innovative Education in Primary School Distance Education Non-Thesis Master's Program and the reflection of the program on their professional lives. In line with this aim, sequential explanatory design from mixed research methods was used in the study. 147 teachers participated in the quantitative part of the study and 52 teachers participated in the qualitative part. The data were collected through a questionnaire and a structured interview form. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data and thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. The study revealed that the majority of participating teachers participated in this program to improve their professional competencies and increase their teaching effectiveness. Participants gave positive evaluations of the live lessons, learning management system, content and assessment methods. It was stated that the program contributed significantly to teachers' personal and professional development. However, a significant number of teachers found the non-interactive lessons ineffective, attributing this to one-way teaching methods, traditional content, limited interactive materials and repetitive topics. In addition, the participants offered various constructive suggestions for the structural features of the program and for providing more effective support for career development.

Keywords: Teacher education, professional development, distance education, non-thesis master's program.

INTRODUCTION

The teacher is the most fundamental element that leads the education and training process and directs education with his/her practices in this process. Therefore, one of the most important ways to improve the quality of education is to support the ongoing professional development of teachers. The rapid changes in knowledge and technology require teachers to renew themselves and to be informed about new teaching methods and pedagogical approaches. Professional development enables teachers to improve their academic knowledge as well as to make classroom environments more efficient with new teaching methods. Therefore, programs and support mechanisms that encourage teacher development play a vital role for an effective education system. It is important that these programs and mechanisms are in line with the requirements of the era and changing dynamics to ensure continuous professional development of teachers.

Changing Dynamics in Education and Teacher Training

Education continually evolves due to social changes and technological advancements, which require teachers to assess their professional skills and adjust to current demands. Consequently, educators must embrace change by acquiring new skills and enhancing their capabilities. Teaching shapes the lives of individuals, fosters social transformation, and integrates innovative methods. Therefore, the teaching profession should improve the quality of education by embracing a lifelong learning mindset. Quality education links closely to the qualifications of teachers. Such qualifications can only be attained by developing the professional competencies of educators. This highlights the significance of teacher training for the success of the education system.

Pre-service education, the initial stage of teacher training, involves policies and procedures aimed at equipping pre-service teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills essential for effectively fulfilling their responsibilities in the classroom, school, and society at large (Thompson & Power, 2015). It represents only the first step in a lengthy process of professional development (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Pre-service teacher education enhances candidates' preparation for their professional careers and contributes to their long-term success in the field; however, the quality and content of these programs vary widely (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). Moreover, whereas teachers' knowledge and skills acquired during their pre-service education once took years to become outdated, this is no longer true (Kyndt, Gijbels, Grosemans, & Donche, 2016). Therefore, although pre-service teacher education establishes a crucial foundation for pre-service teachers to gain the necessary professional competencies, it is insufficient on its own. Hammerness et al. (2005) emphasized that the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for effective instruction cannot be fully developed during pre-service teacher education; rather, teachers must be lifelong learners. On this basis, the concept of professional development is crucial for ensuring that teachers continue their growth throughout their careers. In-service training, regarded as the second stage of teacher education, includes courses and activities designed for teachers to enhance their professional knowledge, skills, and competencies (Osamwonyi, 2016), and is just one aspect of professional development. Villegas-Reimers (2003) highlighted that professional development extends beyond static, one-time in-service training, noting that traditional in-service training includes courses covering relevant content, pedagogical knowledge, and instructional methods.

Ongoing Professional Development and Online Education

Professional development, essential for reforms in teaching and learning (Desimone, 2009), typically involves activities that enhance teachers' knowledge, skills, expertise, and individual traits (OECD, 2009). Teachers face continuous and rapid changes in education (Kyndt, Gijbels, Grosemans, & Donche, 2016), necessitating the ongoing improvement of their professional traits to adapt to these changes and to review and update their knowledge, skills, and vision for effective teaching (Day, 1999). Professional development is crucial for enriching teachers' knowledge and skills, transforming teaching practices, and ultimately boosting student achievement. It also plays a vital role in ensuring the successful implementation of education policies (Desimone, 2009). Teachers are expected to set a standard in instruction, communicate effectively with students who have diverse needs, motivations, conditions, and skills, collaborate with communities both inside and outside the classroom, adapt to social and educational changes, and maintain their commitment, enthusiasm, and self-confidence. These roles form the foundation of the teaching profession, and professional development seeks to enable teachers to meet these challenges in evolving circumstances (Day, 1999). Guskey (2002) argued that the three primary goals of professional development programs are to facilitate changes in classroom practices, shift teachers' attitudes and beliefs, and, as a result, improve learning outcomes. The interest in professional development and learning styles of teachers has grown in the 21st century to support the increasingly complex skills students need to learn for their future education and work requirements, ultimately improving learning outcomes (Bredeson & Johansson, 2000; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Lecat, Spaltman, Beausaert, Raemdonck, & Kyndt, 2020). More advanced instructional methods are required for students to gain in-depth knowledge and develop critical thinking, complex problem solving, effective communication, collaboration, and self-management skills. Therefore, effective professional development programs are essential for teachers to acquire the pedagogical approaches necessary to impart these skills (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). However, these programs should focus on content and maintain consistency, ensure collective participation through active learning, span a sufficient period, utilize effective application models, offer expert support and coaching, provide feedback and opportunities for reflection, and be continuous to be effective (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Desimone, 2009). Yet, current professional development programs often lack these features, which can limit their effectiveness. It has been noted that these programs fail to adequately help teachers improve their performance because they are not tailored to the specific needs and busy schedules of teachers. Additionally, they do not foster collaboration and collective learning, lack practicality, and do not provide feedback or monitoring systems. As a result, the expected outcomes are not achieved, rendering the programs ineffective in supporting positive changes in teaching practices and student learning (Altun & Yengin Sarpkaya, 2021; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Sprague, 2007).

Additionally, economic challenges, transportation issues, and a lack of time are significant factors that impede teachers' professional development (Chin et al., 2022; Kucukkapdan and Kulekci Akyavuz, 2024). Because of these constraints, teachers often view professional development programs as an extra burden during their already hectic workdays, and some teachers and administrators may even regard them as a type of leave rather than a professional necessity (Liu, 2002). This perception diminishes the value placed on professional development and can hinder the anticipated benefits of these programs. Nonetheless, supporting teachers' professional growth is a crucial and fundamental aspect of efforts aimed at enhancing teaching, learning, and achievement standards (Day, 1999). Therefore, facilitating professional development for teachers is vital for improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools (Dille and Røkenes, 2021). In recent years, distance education-based professional development programs have emerged as a viable alternative to some of these challenges. Distance education is characterized as organized teaching and planned learning that necessitates communication through technological devices and a distinct institutional framework, where instruction typically occurs in a location separate from where learning takes place (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). Distance education started in the mid-19th century with the teaching of stenography by letter initiated by Isaac Pitman in England and became widespread in the 20th century with the use of mass media such as radio and television in education (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright & Zvacek, 2015). In the 21st century, with the development of digital technologies, distance education has become a flexible and accessible learning environment and has started to play an important role in the professional development of individuals (Anderson, 2008). Distance education provides significant advantages over traditional professional development methods, such as cost reduction, flexibility in time and space (Iqbal & Azhar, 2024), the ability to reach a larger number of students, and allowing them to learn at their own pace (Freire, Mangas, Costa, & Costa, 2021), as well as supporting lifelong learning (Makokotlela, 2022). Due to these benefits, distance education has the potential to yield learning outcomes that are equal to or even surpass those of traditional face-to-face education (Means, Toyama, Murphy, & Baki, 2013). As can be seen, the impact of distance education on professional development in the digital age has created a significant transformation, especially in terms of providing flexible learning opportunities. Online education platforms supported by technological tools support lifelong learning processes by facilitating individuals' access to information without space and time constraints (Moore, Dickson-Deane, & Galyen, 2011). In addition, the ability of individuals to interact with content suitable for their own learning pace increases their motivation to learn and contributes to the development of professional competencies (Means, Toyama, Murphy, & Baki, 2013). In this context, it is seen that distance education is not only limited to knowledge transfer but also enables the development of 21st century skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and digital literacy (Anderson, 2008). Therefore, distance education models stand out as an effective learning alternative, especially in fields where continuous professional development is mandatory.

In the context of teacher professional development, the significance of distance education has grown even further with the reshaping of educational approaches in the post-pandemic era. The COVID-19 crisis revealed the necessity for teachers to enhance their digital pedagogical competencies (Trust & Whalen, 2020), and online professional development programs have emerged as rapid and effective responses to this need. The experiences gained during this period revealed that online environments, although initially adopted as temporary solutions for emergencies, can also serve as foundational components of sustainable learning ecosystems (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Moreover, the accessibility of online professional development opportunities has promoted equity among teachers, offering personalized and participatory learning experiences that have transformed perspectives on teaching and learning (Philipsen, Tondeur, Roblin, Vanslambrouck, & Zhu, 2019). In this regard, supporting professional learning communities based on distance education has become a key priority in today's educational policy agendas to ensure that teachers can effectively adapt to ever-evolving educational technologies. As a result of these developments, the distance education model has increasingly become a preferred mode of learning at the postgraduate level. Research indicates that working individuals face several challenges in starting and continuing their postgraduate studies. Among these challenges, obtaining necessary workplace permissions or the lack of preferred programs offered at universities in the individual's region stand out. Therefore, thesis/non-thesis master's programs available through distance education provide an important alternative for those who struggle to access postgraduate opportunities, particularly due to time and location constraints (Yildizhan, 2017). One of these programs is the Distance Education Non-Thesis Master's Program in Innovative Education in Primary Schools, launched within the Anadolu University Graduate Education Institute, Department of Basic Education. This program, which began in the spring term of 2019-2020, primarily aims to enhance the qualifications of educators. Its objective is for educators at various institutions and levels to keep up with advancements in science and technology following their training and to apply new, innovative methods in imparting knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to students.

This study analyzed the perspectives of teachers in the Distance Education Non-Thesis Master's Program in Innovative Education in Primary Schools regarding the program and its reflection on their professional lives. The literature review revealed that no study has been conducted on this specific program. Furthermore, this program is offered solely by Anadolu University, making the absence of any evaluation study particularly significant and necessary. The existing literature on distance education non-thesis master's programs primarily focuses on students' and faculty members' opinions regarding the program (Baglibel and Arslan, 2014; Gul and Arabaci, 2018; Yadigar, 2010; Yildizhan, 2017), individual and social outcomes of the program (Deveci and Ture, 2022), factors influencing program participation (Yalcinkaya, 2021), reasons for choosing the program (Alabas, Kamer, and Polat, 2012; Usta, 2019; Schneller and Holmberg, 2014), challenges faced in the online learning environment (Gungoren, Gur Erdogan, and Kaya Uyanik, 2019), the impact of course attendance on academic success (Demirkan, 2016), the connection between students' lifelong learning tendencies and their self-efficacy regarding educational technology standards (Ozciftci and Cakir, 2015), and their attitudes towards engaging in educational activities within a mobile environment (Bolat, Aydemir, & Karaman, 2017). However, there is currently no study in the literature examining how distance education non-thesis master's programs reflection teachers' professional lives. Therefore, this study makes an original contribution by addressing both the perspectives of teachers enrolled in a different program and the reflections of the education received on their professional lives. This study is expected to highlight a well-designed professional development program and its reflection on teachers' professional lives. The findings from this study may inform the planning and implementation of professional development programs delivered through distance education, allowing for the creation of programs that more effectively meet teachers' professional needs.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research aimed to explore the perspectives of teachers enrolled in the Distance Education Non-Thesis Master's Program in Innovative Education for Primary Schools and to assess how the program has influenced their professional lives. Therefore, the following research questions were established:

- Why did teachers decide to enroll in the Distance Education Non-Thesis Master's Program in Innovative Education for Primary Schools?
- What do they think about the structure and functioning of the courses in the program?

- What are the reflections of the program on their professional lives?
- What issues did they face in the program?
- What suggestions do they have for improving the program's effectiveness?

METHOD

This section discusses the research model, participants, data collection and analysis, validity, and reliability of the study.

The Research Model

The present study, which aimed to investigate teachers' views on the Distance Education Non-Thesis Master's Program in Innovative Education in Primary Schools and its reflection on their professional lives, was conducted using a mixed research method. This method combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain comprehensive and in-depth data (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). The study employed both quantitative and qualitative techniques to collect comprehensive data. Consequently, a sequential explanatory design was adopted, which entails the collection and analysis of qualitative data following the collection and analysis of quantitative data. Similarly, the quantitative data are initially analyzed, followed by the examination of qualitative data and the interpretation of all study data. The design utilizes qualitative findings to explain and interpret quantitative results (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Creswell, 2003). In this research, the quantitative method was first employed to assess teachers' views on the program and its reflections on their professional lives. Then, the qualitative method was applied to clarify these views and reflections. The research model is illustrated in Figure 1.

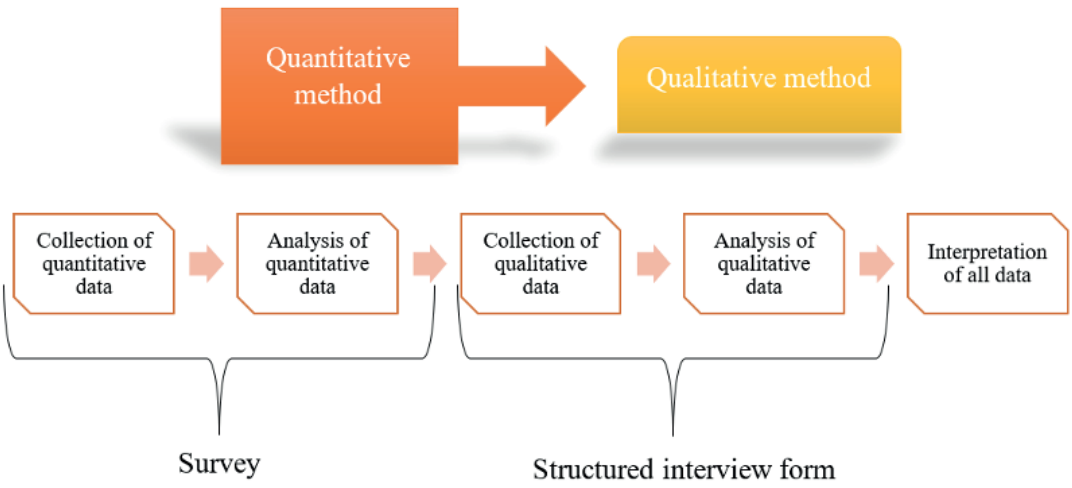

Figure 1. The research model

As shown in Figure 1, the sequential explanatory design was used to first collect and analyze quantitative data based on the survey created by the authors. Next, qualitative data were gathered and analyzed using the structured interview form developed to clarify the findings. All data are interpreted and presented in the findings section.

Participants

The study participants included teachers attending the Distance Education Non-Thesis Master's Program in Innovative Education in Primary Schools. The study data were collected between 2022-2023 fall semester and 2024-2025 fall semester from the current students at the end of each semester. The authors attempted to reach all graduate students during these periods. First, quantitative data and then qualitative data were collected. Convenience sampling was utilised in the study. This sampling type is based on elements that are easy and fast to reach (Patton, 2005). Therefore, in this study, data were collected from volunteer teachers who continued the program. Participant demographics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant demographics

Demographic		f	%
Gender	Female	128	87,1
	Male	19	12,9
Seniority	Not yet started	1	0,7
	1-5 years	26	17,7
	6-10 years	58	39,5
	11-15 years	24	16,3
	16-20 years	30	20,4
	21 years or more	8	5,4
The grade instructed	1st	34	23,1
	2nd	40	27,4
	3rd	30	20,4
	4th	37	25,1
	Administrator	5	3,4
	Not yet started	1	0,6
Region of employment	Central Anatolia	37	25,1
	Marmara	44	30
	Aegean	16	10,9
	Mediterranean	10	6,9
	Black Sea	4	2,8
	Southeastern Anatolia	23	15,7
	Eastern Anatolia	11	7,4
	Greece	1	0,6
	Not yet started	1	0,6
	Total	147	100

Most of the participating teachers were female (87.1%). Among them, 39.5% had 6-10 years of seniority. Of these teachers, 27.4% taught 2nd grade, 25.1% taught 4th grade, 23.1% taught 1st grade, and 20.4% taught 3rd grade. Administrators comprised 3.4% of the participants. Most teachers worked in the Marmara Region (30%), followed by Central Anatolia (25.1%), Southeastern Anatolia (15.7%), and Aegean (10.9%). Only one teacher (0.6%) participated from abroad. A total of 147 teachers took part in the quantitative study. However, since not all teachers responded to certain questions, the distribution of responses is inconsistent. Additionally, 52 teachers participated in the qualitative study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Multiple data collection instruments were employed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data for the study. The data collection tools used in the research include the following:

Personal Information Form: This form was utilized to collect demographic data from participants. It featured closed-ended questions about gender, professional seniority, grade level taught, and employment region.

Survey: Before creating the survey form, focus group interviews were conducted with ten teachers. These interviews included questions designed to allow the teachers to evaluate the program and explain how it reflected their professional lives. In the analysis, themes emerged regarding the reasons for choosing the program, the methods used for instruction and course structure, the program's contributions to their professional lives, encountered challenges, and suggestions. Based on the teachers' feedback from focus group interviews, seventy items were developed. Then, the items were sent to five instructors of the program for expert review. Based on their responses, twelve inadequate, repetitive, or unclear items were removed. Thus, the final survey consisted of fifty-eight closed-ended questions. The questions about the reasons for attending the program, experienced challenges, and suggestions were rated on a three-point Likert scale ("Yes, Partially, No"), while the remaining items were scored on a five-point Likert scale ("Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree"). In the questionnaire, the structure and teaching of the course consists of learning system, live lessons, reading suggestions, discussion forums and evaluation; the contributions of the program section consists of professional development, general culture and social dimension.

Structured interview form: The form was developed to collect in-depth data. It included four open-ended questions regarding general views on the program, the program's reflections on the participants' professional lives, problems experienced during the program, and suggestions. Teachers were asked to respond in writing.

The quantitative data collected from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, such as percentages and frequencies, to understand the views of participating teachers about the program. Thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data gathered through structured interviews. This type of analysis aims to identify patterns within the data. In other words, it examines the similarities, differences, and correlations in the dataset, revealing the themes. Thematic analysis involves several stages: recognizing the data, creating initial codes and potential themes, examining those themes, defining and naming them, and composing the research report (Braun and Clarke 2006; Gibson and Brown, 2009). Consequently, the authors first read and coded the data, then identified the appropriate codes and established the themes. Afterward, they reviewed the themes, compared them with participant statements, reassessed the names of the themes and subthemes, and reported the findings supported by direct quotes from participants. Due to the use of sequential explanatory design in this study, the general headings created in the questionnaire were taken as the basis for the creation of the main themes. In the creation of sub-themes and codes, teachers' opinions were taken into consideration in parallel with these titles.

Validity and Reliability

During the development of the data collection tools, program instructors were consulted, and the tools were finalized based on their feedback. Various methods were used to ensure the credibility, transferability, consistency, and confirmability of the qualitative data (Erlandson et al., 1993). Accordingly, multiple data collection tools were employed to ensure credibility, and participants validated the collected data. Direct quotes were also included to enhance transferability. To maintain consistency, experts reviewed the data collection tools, and the two authors—who are specialists in primary school instruction—analyzed the data independently. For confirmability, the raw data and findings were compared, and both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments were utilized.

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings of the study are organized under subheadings that correspond to the study's sub-objectives.

Reasons for Teachers' Preference for the Program

The study discusses the reasons why teachers enrolled in the Distance Education Non-Thesis Master's Program in Innovative Education for Primary Schools preferred the program. Table 2 presents the distribution of teachers' reasons for attending the program.

Table 2. Reasons why teachers enrolled in the program

Reason	Agree		Partially		Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
To be trained as a specialist teacher	27	20,9	40	31	62	48,1
Because of online education	96	73,8	30	23,1	4	3,1
Because I wanted a graduate degree	119	88,1	13	9,7	3	2,2
For occupational self-improvement	134	93,7	6	4,2	3	2,1
To establish a foundation for master's degree with thesis	40	32,5	35	28,5	48	39
To improve my professional skills	133	95	6	4,3	1	0,7
To follow up the developments in my field	126	92,6	8	5,9	2	1,5

Most teachers enrolled in the program for professional self-improvement (f=134, 93.7%) and to enhance their professional skills (f=133, 95%). Some teachers wished to keep up with developments in their field (f=126, 92.6%). Obtaining a master's degree (f=119, 88.1%) and the fact that the program is offered through distance education (f=96, 73.8%) were additional reasons for participating in the program. It was noted that only 32.5% of the teachers enrolled in this program to lay the groundwork for a master's degree with a thesis. Furthermore, 20.9% of the teachers indicated that they joined the program to become specialist teachers, which represents a career advancement. Thus, it can be suggested that teachers primarily enrolled in the program for professional self-improvement and to enhance their professional qualifications. These reasons are illustrated in Figure 2 as reported by the teachers.

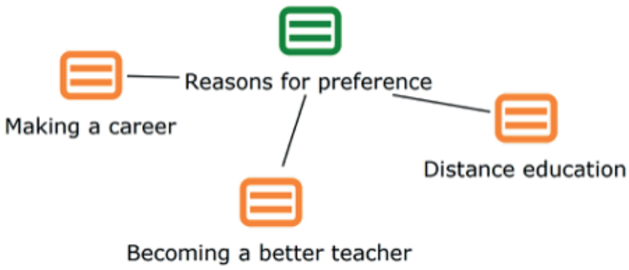

Figure 2. Reasons for enrollment in the program

Teachers enrolled in the program to advance their careers and improve as educators. The distance education format was mentioned as another reason for their enrollment. One teacher, who enrolled to further their career, noted, "...this program was important for learning by applying what I studied in the courses and advancing my career (T5)," highlighting both career advancement and the goal of becoming a better teacher. Another teacher who emphasized career progression stated: "I want to improve academically. However, poor transportation to my workplace led me to prefer this online program …(T28)," pointing out the distance education format due to personal circumstances. Another teacher cited distance education as a reason for enrollment, saying: "Distance education will not affect my professional life (T17)." A teacher aiming to be a better educator expressed their reason as follows: "To improve myself professionally…(T15)," while another remarked: "I chose this program to become a better primary school teacher (T25)." Thus, it can be inferred that teachers were drawn to the program due to its online format and for both personal and professional reasons. The quantitative study demonstrated that the teachers' preference for professional self-development and the desire to be better educators supported the qualitative study data, indicating that the teachers' aspiration to excel in teaching went hand in hand with their pursuit of professional growth. It can also be stated that teachers emphasised distance education as a reason for preference. In the qualitative section, it was seen that teachers emphasised self-improvement and the way the program was conducted. However, considering both the quantitative and qualitative sections, it can be said that the main reason for preference is that teachers want to improve themselves in their fields.

Teachers' Perspectives on the Structure and Instruction of the Courses in the Program

The study determined teachers' views on the structure and instruction of the program courses, which are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Teachers' views on the structure and instruction of the program courses

Structure and instruction of the courses	Completely agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Completely disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Leaning system										
Mergen learning management system is easy to use.	77	52,4	56	38,1	9	6,1	5	3,4	-	-
The Mergen learning management system's capacity to utilize visual and audio resources solidifies the instruction.	63	42,6	74	50	8	5,4	3	2	-	-
Live lessons										
Conducting lessons in a synchronous live format makes learning meaningful.	96	64,9	45	30,4	4	2,7	3	2	-	-
Recording live lessons and the opportunity to watch them again makes it easier for us to repeat the content.	124	83,8	21	14,1	1	0,7	2	1,4	-	-
Interacting with the instructor in live lessons increases our motivation.	117	79,1	27	18,1	2	1,4	1	0,7	1	0,7
Sharing screens during live lessons facilitates the flow of the lesson.	116	78,9	26	17,6	2	1,4	2	1,4	1	0,7
Using activities that activate the students, such as question-answer and discussion, in live lessons increases the effectiveness of the course.	106	71,6	35	23,7	4	2,7	3	2	-	-
Messaging during live lessons helps clarify any confusing points.	109	74,6	29	19,9	5	3,4	2	1,4	1	0,7
The use of presentations in live lessons solidifies the explanations.	112	75,6	29	19,5	4	2,8	2	1,4	1	0,7
Ability to download the presentations facilitates repeating the lesson.	123	83,1	20	13,5	4	2,7	1	0,7	-	-
Reading suggestions										
Reading recommendations allow us to benefit from other resources.	100	68,5	36	24,6	7	4,8	2	1,4	1	0,7
Reading recommendations allow us to follow innovations in the field.	95	65,1	38	26	9	6,1	3	2,1	1	0,7
Reading recommendations allow us to understand the topic better.	92	62,6	41	27,8	11	7,5	2	1,4	1	0,7
Reading recommendations facilitate homework.	85	59,4	42	29,4	12	8,4	3	2,1	1	0,7
Discussion forums										
Discussion forums enable us to learn key aspects of the subject.	74	51	42	29	24	16,5	3	2,1	2	1,4

Discussion forums enable us to share our views with others.	78	53,7	41	28,3	22	15,2	3	2,1	1	0,7
Discussion forums encourage us to explore our curiosities.	73	50,6	45	31,3	21	14,6	4	2,8	1	0,7
Discussion forums help us be prepared for lessons.	69	48	41	28,4	27	18,7	6	4,2	1	0,7
Evaluation										
Homework evaluations enhance our understanding and retention of the subjects.	64	48,1	34	25,6	26	19,5	2	1,5	7	5,3
Homework evaluations allow permanent learning.	63	45,6	36	26,1	29	21	3	2,2	7	5,1
The face-to-face evaluation has led us to work towards the exam.	57	40,4	43	30,6	15	10,6	10	7,1	16	11,3

Items related to live lessons, the learning system, reading recommendations, discussion forums, and evaluations were included to gather teachers' opinions on the course structure and instruction. Most teachers (f=124, 83.8%) indicated that they strongly agreed that recording live lessons and the ability to download presentations (f=123, 83.1%) made it easy for them to revisit the lessons. Other items that teachers strongly agreed upon included that interaction with the instructor in live lessons increased motivation (f=117, 79.1%), screen sharing in live lessons enhanced fluency during the class (f=116, 78.9%), presentations used solidified learning (f=112, 75.6%), messaging clarified unclear points (f=109, 74.6%), and engaging methods that encouraged student participation in live lessons made these effective (f=106, 71.6%). It can be suggested that teachers' views on live lessons were positive. Most teachers strongly agreed that reading recommendations helped them explore the topic in other resources (f=100, 68.5%). These resources enabled them to keep up with innovations (f=95, 65.1%) and assisted them in better understanding the topic (f=92, 62.6%). Teachers also strongly agreed that discussion forums allowed them to share their views with others (f=78, 51%). Moreover, they strongly agreed that the Mergen learning system was easy to use (f=77, 52.4%). Additionally, teachers agreed that homework evaluations helped them internalize the subject (f=64, 48.1%) and contributed to permanent learning (f=63, 45.6%). The teachers believed that live lessons had a positive impact on their training. The subthemes and codes regarding teachers' views on the course's structure and instruction are presented in Figure 3.

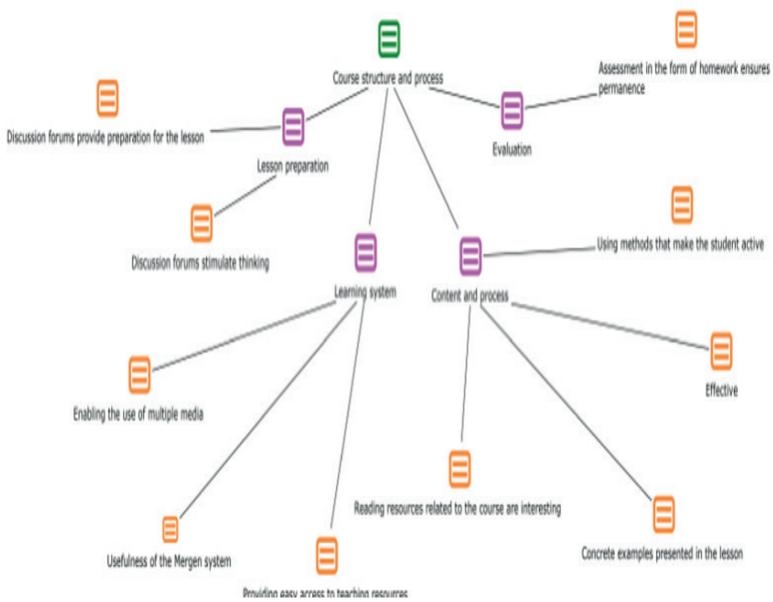

Figure 3. Course structure and instruction

Teachers' perspectives on the course's structure and instruction were examined through the lenses of lesson preparation, learning systems, content and instruction, and evaluation. Concerning lesson preparation, teachers noted that discussion forums offered foundational preparation and encouraged their thinking. In fact, teachers exclusively referenced discussion forums in relation to lesson preparation. One teacher remarked that discussion forums facilitated foundational preparation for the lesson: "We can say that discussion forums contributed to the development of preliminary information and preparation for the lesson (T50)." Another teacher added, "The questions posed in the discussion (forum) prompted us to brainstorm, that is, to think (T36)." Teachers also commented on the availability of multimedia within the learning system, the organization of the Mergen learning system, and the accessibility of resources. A teacher noted that the learning system allowed for multimedia use: "The presentation of instruction on the screen, the instant transmission of my questions as messages, and the ability to share videos on the screen—which means instruction was both visual and auditory and involved questions and answers—made it productive (T41)." He emphasized the importance of sharing during live lessons and how it enhanced efficiency. Another teacher commented: "The Mergen system is quite organized; it facilitates the exchange of information (T44)." They also highlighted easy access to resources: "It was easy to download the uploaded PDFs and access the recommended resources (T43)." Regarding content and instruction, teachers noted that the program was effective, the methods engaged students actively, concrete examples were provided, and the reading resources were appealing. A teacher found the program effective: "I think the lessons were related to my field; I listened to them with pleasure, and I believe they were productive (T26)." Another teacher believed the program was effective: "There was a lot of information about children's education, so I think it was effective and enjoyable (T28)." A different teacher remarked: "It was productive when we were active, when we were asked and answered questions, and when case studies were used in the instruction (T12)," attributing its effectiveness to the methods that engaged them in class. Another teacher commented on the instruction: "We watched videos and looked at photographs; materials were used in the lessons to provide concrete examples (T15)." A teacher stated that "The fact that some recommended readings were interesting encouraged us to read and learn (T34)." They emphasized that homework-based evaluations increased the permanence of learning: "The evaluations in the form of homework increased permanence (T31)". It can be said that the teachers' statement in the qualitative section that the discussion forums encourage them to think about the lesson explains the statement in the quantitative section that the discussion forums enable them to come prepared for the lesson. Teachers' views on the learning system in both quantitative and qualitative contexts show parallelism in terms of ease of access to resources. It was observed that the teachers emphasised only effective learning in the qualitative section regarding the content and teaching of the course. However, it is seen that the teachers did not mention the feature of recording and replaying live lessons, which they emphasised in the quantitative section, in the qualitative section. Thus, it can be suggested that the teachers emphasized the learning process in the lessons in the realm of course structure and instruction. The quantitative study data also emphasized shared materials in live lessons, and methods that led to active student participation. Therefore, it can be said that the qualitative findings in the context of the structure and teaching of the course explain the quantitative findings by providing more concrete examples such as the use of multimedia and effective learning methods.

The Reflection of Program Courses on the Professional Life of Teachers

The study included items related to the professional development, general culture, and social life of the teachers to determine the reflection of the courses on their professional lives. Table 4 presents the teachers' related views.

Table 4. The views of the teachers on the reflection of program courses on their professional life

Contrubition of Program	Completely agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Completely disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Professional development										
I learned new things in the courses.	68	46,6	54	37	13	9	9	6	2	1,4
I learned methods that will improve active participation of the students.	63	43,4	56	38,6	15	10,3	8	5,6	3	2,1
I learned how to instruct courses more effectively.	64	44,4	55	38,2	15	10,4	8	5,6	2	1,4
I developed a more positive perspective on the courses I instruct.	71	49	57	39,3	7	4,8	8	5,5	2	1,4
I learned how to concretize abstract information I instruct.	57	39	57	39	17	11,6	12	8,3	3	2,1
I implemented what I learned in the classroom (in the learning-teaching process).	57	39	63	43,1	15	10,3	8	5,5	3	2,1
I shared what I learned with my colleagues.	55	37,9	58	40	23	15,9	6	4,1	3	2,1
I learned about scientific research processes.	52	37,5	65	40,3	14	13,2	7	6,9	8	2,1
I remembered the information I had learned before but had forgotten.	78	53,4	58	38,3	6	4,1	2	1,4	2	1,4
General culture										
I started to follow current issues.	54	37,5	58	40,3	19	13,2	10	6,9	3	2,1
I acquired different perspectives thanks to the resources such as movies and books recommended in the courses.	62	42,8	59	40,7	15	10,3	6	4,1	3	2,1
Social dimension										
I started interacting with new faculty members.	74	51	53	36,6	10	6,9	5	3,4	3	2,1
I got to know new colleagues in the program.	88	60,3	45	30,7	9	6,2	2	1,4	2	1,4
I interacted with my colleagues to improve instruction.	72	49,3	59	40,4	9	6,2	4	2,7	2	1,4
I have my relationships with my students.	61	42,4	62	43,1	10	6,8	9	6,3	2	1,4

On regarding the reflection of program courses on their professional lives, the teachers strongly agreed that they could recall the information they had previously learned but forgotten (f=78, 53.4%). They also concurred that the program enabled them to develop a more positive perspective on the courses they taught (f=71, 49%), that they learned new concepts (f=68, 46.6%), more effective instructional methods (f=64, 44.4%), and learning techniques that would enhance student participation (f=63, 43.4%). The teachers agreed that they gained insights into the scientific research process in the program (f=65, 40.3%), learned how to apply what they studied in the classroom (f=63, 43.1%), and shared their insights with their colleagues (f=58, 40%). Teachers completely agreed that they gained different perspectives from resources such as movies and books suggested in the courses (f=62, 42.8%), and they noted that they began to follow current issues in the general culture dimension (f=58, 40.3%). In the social dimension, they affirmed that they met new colleagues (f=88, 60.3%) in the program. They also completely agreed that they could interact with other instructors (f=74, 51%) and colleagues (f=72, 49.3%). Therefore, it can be suggested that the program courses contributed to the professional development of teachers. The subthemes and codes based on teachers' opinions about the reflection of the program courses on their professional lives are presented in Figure 4.

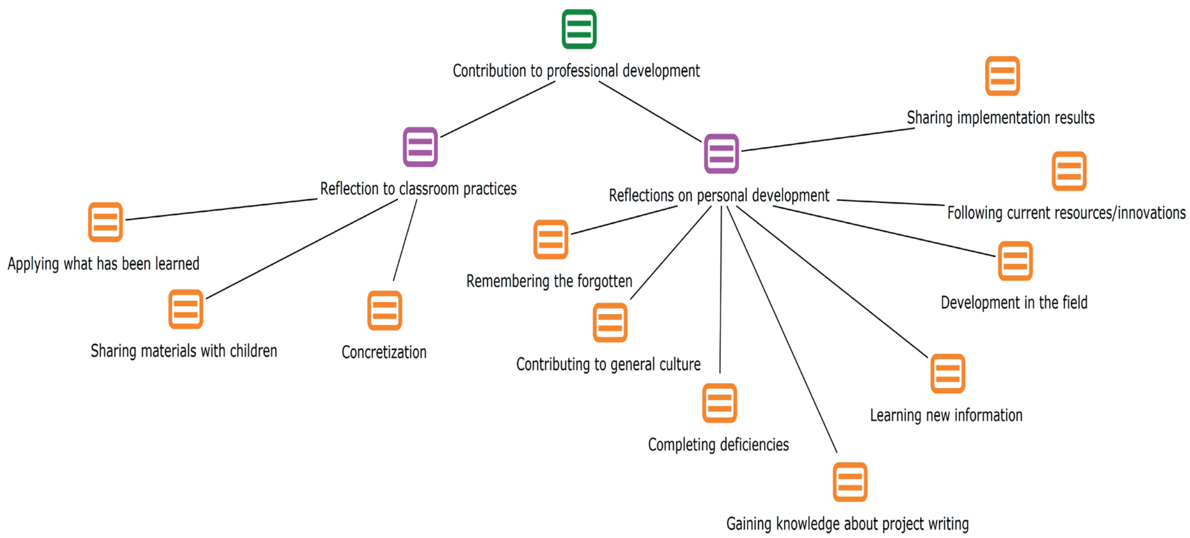

Figure 4. The contrubiton of program courses on the professional development of the teachers

The program's reflection on teachers' professional development was discussed regarding its reflections on classroom practices and personal growth. Accordingly, teachers shared their perspectives on applying what they learned in the classroom, sharing materials from the courses with students, and supporting their learning. One teacher stated that they employed what they learned in the program in their lessons: "For example, there was an aquarium technique that I learned in the program and a few others, I had the chance to apply them in my classroom, then I had the students draw different pictures in the visual arts class … (T21)," emphasizing the new teaching methods and techniques they learned. Another teacher said, "I started to encourage my students to write creatively, I allowed them to draw pictures using different techniques, I learned to make students active in values education, and now I try to include the parents as well (T18)," emphasizing active learning and parental cooperation. One teacher stated, "I shared the interesting parts of some movies we watched with my students. They were also very interested and asked different questions. I tried to give them information about the subject (S38)." The teacher also mentioned that they shared the classroom material with their students. Another teacher noted that they learned to substantiate abstract information: "I learned the logic of substantiation of abstract concepts (T44)." One teacher expressed that the program courses contributed to their professional development and were beneficial for their career: "I think the training contributed to my career. The courses guided us on several topics, like teaching and learning, student behavior, and artistic activities. We refreshed prior knowledge from university and also acquired new knowledge. For example, I enriched my visual arts course with different activities. I learned to use technology in education differently during the digital technologies course. I discovered new methods in values education (T51)." Based on the teachers' opinions, it can be suggested that their learning impacted implementation. Teachers believed that the program courses also contributed to their personal development. Teachers mentioned regarding the program's reflection on personal development that they shared the application results, began to follow the latest resources and innovations, recalled forgotten knowledge, enriched their general culture, enhanced their understanding, acquired knowledge in project development, learned new information, and developed professionally. One teacher mentioned sharing their application outcomes: "Learning and applying learning techniques sparked my interest. I also shared the outcomes and what I learned with my colleagues, and I further improved by discussing it with them (T5)." Another teacher noted: "(The program) facilitated the activation of the education-training process, supported the programs, and kept us informed about educational innovations (T21)." A different teacher remarked that they were updated on current resources in the program: "Useful current resources were introduced in the courses, allowing us to follow ongoing issues such as technology addiction and digital parenting." Others shared the following: "I recalled knowledge that I had forgotten (T42)" and "I remembered what we learned in university." Another teacher stated, "It was beneficial for me, particularly regarding general culture; there were recommended books, movies, and various topics that we were unaware of, which were discussed in the courses. I believe it was beneficial in terms of general culture… (T33).” One teacher highlighted the process's role in their development: “…it was helpful for me to identify and work on my weaknesses as a teacher (T42).” One teacher noted that the program helped them improve their weaknesses: “In addition to gaining new knowledge, I worked on my weaknesses and realized that learning doesn't stop at the university; it's a lifelong process (T11).” Another teacher remarked, “I learned how to write a project (T3).” Others added, “It helped us develop ourselves (T23),” and “Learning and implementing new approaches contributed to my professional development (T37).” Thus, it can be suggested that teachers generally agreed that the program courses contributed to self-development. The qualitative study findings regarding the program's role in professional development aligned with the quantitative findings related to gaining new knowledge, recalling forgotten information, and staying updated on current issues. Applying what they have learnt, concretising what they have taught, remembering forgotten information, realising new learnings, which the teachers discussed in the qualitative section, explain the dimension of reflection on professional development in the quantitative section more deeply. However, the teachers' acquiring new colleagues, which was discussed in the quantitative section, was not expressed in the qualitative section.

Problems Experienced by Teachers in the Program

The related survey items determined the problems teachers experienced in the program. Table 5 presents the distribution of teachers' opinions on these problems.

Table 5. The problems teachers experienced in the program

Problem	Agree		Partially agree		Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
I encountered courses in the program that were not relevant to the field.	28	19,2	40	27,4	78	53,4
The presentations were not interesting.	17	11,7	59	40,7	69	47,6
The courses lacked practical knowledge.	19	13	43	29,5	84	57,5
I had technical issues with live lessons.	12	8,2	53	36,3	81	55,5
I got bored with non-interactive live lessons.	64	43,8	47	32,2	35	24
I could not use the Mergen learning management system.	-	-	9	6,2	136	93,8
I experienced communication problems with the instructors.	6	4,1	31	21,4	108	74,5
I could not access the offices for face-to-face exams.	35	24	24	16,4	87	59,6

Most teachers reported feeling bored during non-interactive live lessons (f=64, 43.8%). They indicated that they did not encounter any other significant issues. Consequently, teachers disagreed with the statements regarding the Mergen learning system (f=136, 93.8%), communication challenges with instructors (f=108, 74.5%), access to exam bureaus (f=87, 59.6%), practical knowledge in the courses (f=84, 57.5%), and technical issues in live lessons (f=81, 55.5%). Therefore, it can be concluded that teachers did not face any major problems. The only challenge noted within the program was the instructional method. The subthemes and codes regarding the issues faced by teachers are shown in Figure 5.

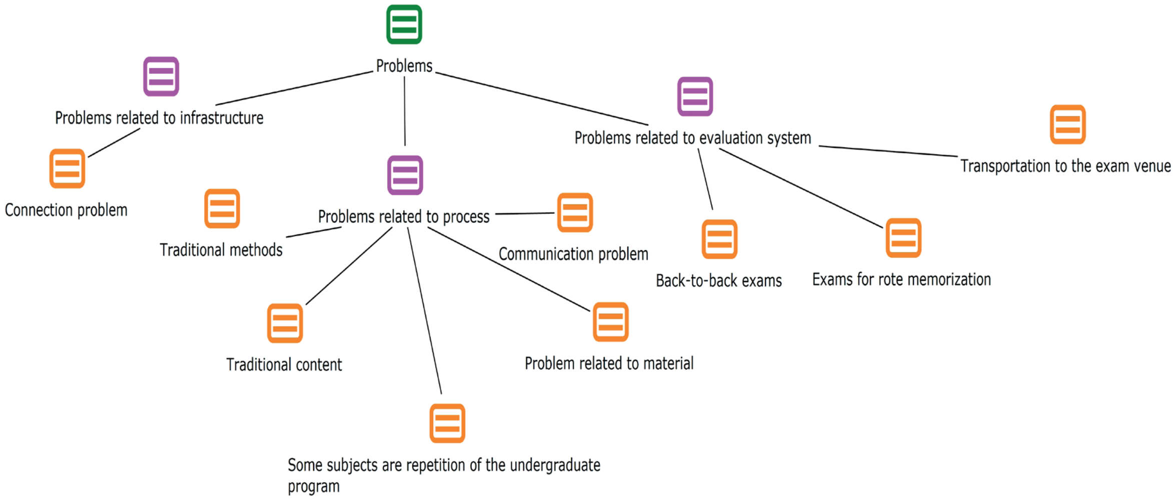

Figure 5. Problems

The problems experienced by teachers in the program were discussed under the problems associated with the infrastructure, process, and evaluation. The connection issue was considered an infrastructure problem. One teacher stated that they experienced connection problems: "… sometimes there were technical problems in the connection, we were disconnected, sometimes the shared images did not appear on the screen (T21)." The teachers faced issues related to the process, including communication challenges, insufficient materials, the repetition of certain topics from undergraduate studies, and the traditional nature of the content and methodology. One teacher addressed the communication issue by stating, "Sometimes we could not see the notices in the system (T33)." Another teacher noted, "Sometimes the materials were only in written form, which diminished our interest and led to boredom (T34)," highlighting the lack of visual materials. A teacher remarked that some subjects repeated knowledge from their undergraduate studies: "We have only reviewed the topics I studied at university so far; maybe I can learn new information from now on. I am a new graduate, and perhaps that is why (T46)." A teacher criticized the course content, saying, "Some courses focused on theoretical knowledge. If they included more practical and applied content, we could better integrate these into our classes. Therefore, I found it traditional...(T23)." Another stated, "There should be courses and content related to technological developments in Web 2.0; the content was rather traditional (T14)." A teacher criticized the conventional methodology used in the program, saying, "In some courses, there were no presentations, and the instructor only narrated the content. This was ineffective (T13)." Therefore, it can be suggested that teachers linked issues in the process to the course content and methodology. Some teachers also encountered problems related to evaluation, which included difficulties accessing the exam venue, a demanding exam schedule, and rote-based exam questions. One teacher mentioned the transportation issue regarding the exam venue, stating, "The exams were held face-to-face in offices, and our circumstances made transportation to these venues difficult (T8)." Another commented on the demanding exam schedule: "We took 5 traditional exams back-to-back in a single day, which was exhausting and challenging (T3)." Another added, "I think the exams were information-heavy and rote-based (T1)." It can be suggested that teachers faced difficulties with the content and exams in the evaluation dimension. The issue of boredom with non-interactive courses, highlighted as the most significant problem in the quantitative findings, was explained through the traditional content, methodology, and materials in the qualitative findings. Therefore, the problems experienced in non-interactive lessons, which came to the forefront among the problems encountered in the quantitative section, were explained by the teachers in the qualitative section. In addition, unlike the quantitative section, the teachers emphasised the successive exams as a problem in the qualitative section.

Teachers' Recommendations for the Program

In the study, we determined the teachers' recommendations for the program. The distribution of these recommendations is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Teachers' recommendations for the program

Recommendation	Agree		Partially agree		Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Program courses should be practical.	86	58,9	55	37,7	5	3,4
The instruction should utilize concrete examples.	99	67,4	47	31,9	1	0,7
The examples provided in live course should be applicable at primary school level.	106	72,1	39	26,5	2	1,4
Live lessons should contribute to my instruction in the primary school.	111	76,6	34	23,4	-	-
Instruction should allow student participation.	102	69,9	40	27,4	4	2,7
Reading recommendations should be interesting.	103	71	40	27,6	2	1,4
The program should include courses that will contribute to the professional development of primary school teachers.	112	76,2	33	22,4	2	1,4

Most teachers agreed that the program courses should contribute to professional development (f=112, 76.2%) and primary school instruction (f=111, 76.6%). The teachers also agreed that the examples provided in the class should be compatible with primary school teaching (f=106, 72.1%), the reading recommendations should be interesting (f=103, 71%), the lessons should promote active participation of the students (f=102, 69.9%), concrete examples should be provided (f=99, 67.4%), and the courses should be practical (f=86, 58.9%). Teachers agreed with all items regarding recommendations. These recommendations are presented in Figure 6.

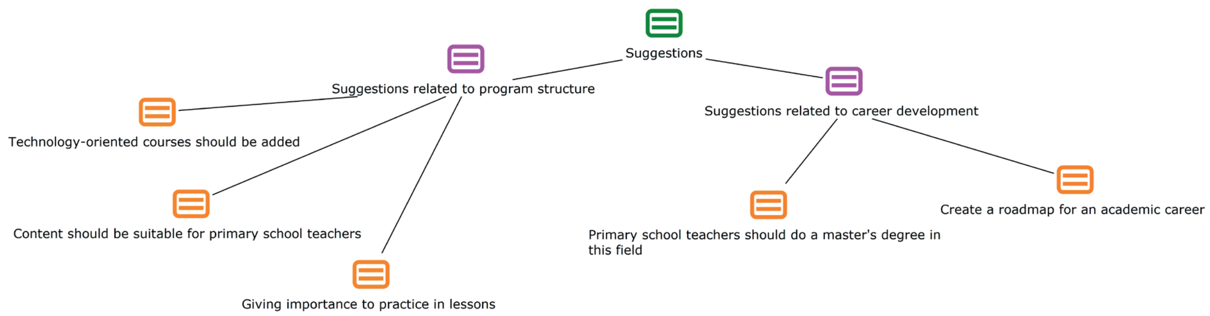

Figure 6. Recommendations

Teachers' recommendations for the program were categorized under recommendations regarding the program structure and career development. Teachers suggested the addition of a technological course to the program, ensuring adequate content for primary school teachers and emphasizing the significance of applied courses: "There could also be a course where Web 2.0 tools are taught and adapted to courses and achievements because it is not possible to complete a class without boring today's children. Since such tools increase the quality and permanence of learning, every teacher should learn them (T37)." A teacher stated that the course content should be suitable for primary school instruction: "…we have addressed general culture requirements in the courses; we need to consider how children learn in primary school; certain lessons did not include examples relevant to primary school. Therefore, the content should be appropriate for us." "Providing more practical examples in the courses would be more beneficial. It would be helpful to see how we can apply what we have learned in class with examples (T22)," "I wish the courses were a bit more practical (T49)," and "…more practical examples and explanations should be incorporated (T24)." They also indicated that the program should provide a roadmap for academic careers, and primary school teachers should earn a master's degree for career development. One teacher commented on academic careers: "It can also offer a path for teachers who will pursue their master's degree (T6)." Another teacher stated, "Primary school teachers should obtain a master's degree in this field (T4)," highlighting the importance of the program and a master's degree for primary school teachers. Based on the teachers' feedback, their recommendations generally aimed to enhance the program's effectiveness. Their suggestions regarding the course content in the quantitative findings aligned with the qualitative findings, stressing the need for contemporary content in the program. Teachers concretised their suggestions regarding the content of the qualitative section by stating that courses on the use of technology should be added. Again, teachers suggested that practice should be given importance in the lessons regarding the non-interactive lessons they expressed in the theme of problems experienced. In addition, in the qualitative section, teachers suggested that those who practice the teaching profession should also benefit from this program.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the study aimed at examining teachers' views on the Distance Education Non-Thesis Master's Program in Innovative Education in Primary Schools and its reflection on their professional lives, we identified the reasons for their attendance in the program, their opinions on the structure and instruction of the course content, the reflections of the program on their careers, the challenges they faced, and their recommendations. It was noted that teachers enrolled in this program primarily to enhance their professional skills, aspiring to become better educators. This finding indicated that their motivations for enrolling were rooted in a desire to develop their professional skills and improve as teachers, reflecting a strong commitment to both professional and personal growth. Similarly, Alabas, Kamer, and Polat (2012) reported that teachers pursued graduate studies for personal development, rapid career advancement, and the desire to build an academic career. This demonstrates that teachers aim not only to fulfill current professional requirements but also to progress in their careers. In contrast to the findings of this study, Usta (2019) argued that individuals enroll in distance non-thesis master's programs primarily for status. These differing findings may reflect various motivations based on the professional structure of the study groups, individual education levels, and demographics. The study's results also indicated that teachers enrolled in the Innovative Education Distance Education Non-Thesis Master's Program in Primary Schools because the program is offered online. Previous studies have also reported that the flexibility of time and space offered by distance education is a significant factor in the preference for this learning model (Gumus and Firat, 2016). Similarly, Schneller and Holmberg (2014) indicated that the flexible structure of the distance education model, which allows individuals to fulfill their family and professional responsibilities concurrently, is the main reason people prefer this model. These findings emphasize the importance of the advantages of distance education programs for individuals striving to achieve their lifelong learning goals, as well as their critical role in both professional development and maintaining personal life balance.

The study findings demonstrated that teachers had a positive view of live lessons, the learning system, course content and instruction, and evaluation methods. Teachers provided the most favorable feedback on live lessons. The ability to record live lessons, download presentations, and engage in interaction were the main elements positively evaluated. The teachers noted that discussion forums significantly contributed to class preparation and encouraged critical thinking. They also expressed favorable opinions about the organized structure of the Mergen learning system and easy access to reading materials. Teachers could access current resources and were informed about innovations throughout the program. They emphasized that evaluating homework was effective because it promoted lasting learning. Overall, teachers' perspectives on the course's structure and instruction indicated that live lessons and a variety of learning materials had a positive impact. Their favorable assessments, particularly concerning live courses and the Mergen system, align with Yildizhan's (2017) findings that the learning management system meets student needs and that technical support enhances learning. Additionally, the observation that homework-based evaluation fosters permanence aligns with results published by Yildizhan (2017). Furthermore, these results align with the literature on effective teacher training through distance education. The literature identifies several key elements for successful distance education programs, including a content-oriented and consistent structure that emphasizes active learning and participation, which facilitates expert support and coaching, feedback, and reflection (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Desimone, 2009). Effective distance education relies on achieving targeted goals and learning outcomes designed for face-to-face education within the context of distance learning, enabling students to acquire the desired learning experiences (Moore, 2007). Burns (2023) reported that an effective distance education system should provide structured instruction, active learning opportunities, and ongoing support for teachers' professional development. Therefore, since the teachers found the live lessons and interaction effective, it can be suggested that the program has fulfilled these requirements.

The study findings indicated that the program contributed teachers' personal and professional development. Regarding professional development, the program aided teachers in recalling forgotten knowledge, acquiring new information, and learning effective instructional techniques that enhanced student participation and scientific research. Teachers noted that the knowledge gained from the program greatly influenced their classroom practices. In terms of personal development, the recommended reading provided in the program enabled teachers to gain new perspectives, stay informed about current issues, connect with new colleagues, and engage with them. Similarly, Deveci and Ture (2022) reported that the online non-thesis master's program in character and value education provided certain professional and personal benefits, which not only impacted individuals but also extended to families, close friends, society, and even on a global scale. Akay, Boz, and Ulusoy (2022) indicated that the postgraduate educational administration program positively influenced the personal and professional development of educators and resulted in gains related to their social environment and status. Studies show that professional development activities like postgraduate education or in-service training allow students to learn modern educational methods, enhance the adoption of information technologies, promote the application of theoretical knowledge in practice, and improve course content and classroom activities, as well as the professional motivation and personal growth of teachers (Kara, 2008; Koktas & Agalday, 2023). The literature on distance education in teacher training suggests that these programs provide teachers with ongoing professional development in content knowledge and pedagogical skills, positively impacting student performance by enhancing teachers' classroom practices (Burns, 2023; Dille & Røkenes, 2021; Elliot, 2017). These findings indicate that effective online professional development programs support the professional and personal growth of teachers, positively impacting not only educators but also students and society as a whole. Additionally, these programs enhance teachers' ability to apply their learning in the classroom. Specifically, utilizing contemporary instructional methods fosters a harmonious integration of theory and practice, thereby improving teachers' practices in the classroom. Consequently, the research results demonstrate that continuous professional development is essential to teacher training and align with existing literature findings.

Teachers indicated that they found non-interactive instruction in the program inadequate, pointing out issues with the instructional methods, traditional content, specific course materials, and the repetitive nature of certain topics. They also reported experiencing difficulties with the infrastructure, processes, and evaluations. A major concern regarding the evaluation system was the reliance on rote-based exam questions. Research shows that online graduate programs face technical and infrastructure challenges, the program content is conventional, theoretical, and not student-oriented, and the evaluations depend on memorized knowledge (Baglibel and Arslan, 2014; Gul and Arabaci, 2018; Yildizhan, 2017). Although distance education allows for overcoming time and space limitations, these findings reveal that issues of accessibility and infrastructure could create inequalities for some students. However, the study's findings align with current literature, highlighting the need for a modern structure, student-centered instruction, and effective evaluation systems in distance education. A key factor for the success of distance education and professional development programs for teachers is that these activities should not concentrate solely on knowledge transfer but should adopt an approach where teachers are active learners, engaging in instructional, assessment, observation, and reflection tasks (Burns, 2023; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Desimone (2009) stated that an effective program must ensure active student participation and assess them using a continuous, dynamic, and context-sensitive approach. Based on these findings, it can be suggested that the technical infrastructure issues and traditional content and rote evaluation limited the program's effectiveness. The findings indicate that for the program to be efficient and effective, interactive methods should be enhanced, the topics and materials should be diversified to address current issues, and the evaluation system should be revised. Therefore, the Distance Education Non-Thesis Master's Program for Innovative Education in Primary Schools should be adjusted to promote active participation among teachers, improve evaluation processes, and be supported by current materials.

The teachers also presented several recommendations to enhance the distance education program. They suggested adding technological courses to the program, ensuring the course content is suitable for primary school teachers, and prioritizing applied methods. Certain studies (Gebel and Tekin Bozkurt, 2022) highlighted that teachers have technological expectations in distance education courses. International studies indicated that effective integration of technologies into instruction is necessary for professional development (Stepp, 2022). This shows that teachers require further training and development opportunities to effectively incorporate technologies into their instruction. High expectations from teachers regarding technology use in online education highlight the significance of technology for effective teaching. This is important because it underscores the need for the digital transformation of education and the teachers' willingness to embrace it. Therefore, distance education programs should incorporate more technology courses to enhance teachers' interest in developing their digital skills. Additionally, teachers' recommendations for adapting program content for primary school educators indicate another significant need. Since primary school teachers generally work with students in the concrete operations stage of cognitive development and teach a variety of subjects, the recommendation that distance education course content be flexible, comprehensive, and tailored to the practical needs of primary school teachers would enhance the effectiveness of the training. Additionally, the recommendation regarding the prioritization of applied methods is deemed critical for teachers to understand student needs and make informed decisions. It is a fact that teachers equipped solely with theoretical knowledge may face challenges in addressing classroom issues. Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2007) reported that education programs should offer practical opportunities to help teachers manage real-life situations in the classroom, emphasizing that practical training should focus on developing their skills for making quick decisions based on student needs. Therefore, revising the Distance Education Non-Thesis Master's Program in Innovative Education in Primary Schools with a practical educational approach similar to actual classroom experiences would play a vital role in the professional development of teachers and the learning experiences of students.

This study aimed to examine the views of teachers enrolled in the Distance Education Non-Thesis Master's Program in Innovative Education in Primary Schools regarding the program and its reflection on their professional lives. Therefore, the findings of the research are limited only to the teachers in this group. This situation limits the generalisability of the findings and does not reflect the experiences and perceptions of teachers studying in different program. Therefore, the research results should be evaluated only in this context. In addition, the data collection process was conducted through qualitative and quantitative methods based on subjective statements such as surveys and semi-structured interviews. Due to the nature of these methods, the individual perceptions, experiences and expressions of the participants may be influenced by personal, social and environmental factors. Therefore, the data obtained reflect the subjective perspectives of the participants and emphasise the contextual nature of the research findings. In addition, the study does not take into account time-dependent variables and measures the participants' perceptions of the program only in a certain period of time. This does not provide a comprehensive view of the long-term effects of the program on teachers' professional lives. Future studies could involve other groups participating in various educational programs. Additionally, more diverse data can be gathered by examining teachers' perspectives from different geographical regions and schools. Longitudinal studies might be carried out to explore how the program's reflection on teachers' professional lives evolves over time. Consequently, the development of skills that teachers acquire in the program and the shifting reflections of the program on their professional lives could be analyzed.

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