

Research Article

The effect of participatory pedagogy and children's participation training on early childhood teachers' views on children's participation

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This study examines the impact of participatory pedagogy and child participation training on early childhood education (ECE) teachers' perspectives on children's participation. The research employed a case study design, one of the qualitative research methods, and involved eight teachers working at an independent kindergarten under the Directorate of National Education in a province located in the inner Aegean region of Türkiye. Four of the teachers worked with 4-year-old children, while the remaining four worked with 5-year-olds. As part of the study, the teachers participated in a training program on participatory pedagogy and child participation, consisting of eight sessions over a four-week period. Following the training, it was found that the teachers' views on child participation had shifted positively. They began to make decisions collaboratively with children, provide them with various choices, and feel more professionally competent in supporting child participation. Furthermore, the teachers integrated their new knowledge into their classroom programs, daily routines, and interactions with children.

Keywords: Early childhood teachers; Participation; Participatory pedagogy; Right to participate

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1. Introduction

The right to participate has gained prominence as attitudes toward children's autonomy have changed (Kosher, 2018). The right to participate was first legally stated in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC] (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) and is one of the fundamental principles of self-determination and democracy (Bae, 2009). Article 12 of the CRC states that children have the right to express their views on all matters of concern to them and that children should be given due consideration according to their age and maturity. The right to participate includes children's freedom to express themselves with or without language, freedom of thought, the right to information, and the right to be heard daily (Nyland, 2009). It is also stated that with this right, children have independent social status in society (Burger, 2019). The right to participation should be practised for all children of different cultures, ethnicities, socio-economic levels and disadvantaged children (Crowley et al., 2021).

Participation is one of the main features of quality early childhood education (Smaree Manassakis, 2020) where children's rights are practised and respected (Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2017).

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Participation in early childhood settings includes being listened to (Clark, 2005; Kangas, 2016); taking part in decision-making processes (Thomas, 2007), being part of the community and democracy (Emilson & Johansson, 2009; Leinonen & Venninen, 2012). Recent research underlines the importance of integrating children's voices into daily routines and institutional decisions (Sousa et al., 2019). Participatory pedagogies enable not only the exercise of democratic rights but also support children's emotional and cognitive development by affirming their agency within learning environments. Despite being included in early childhood education policies, child participation is limited in practice (Theobald et al., 2011). Teachers' ideas and beliefs about participation also influence their practices to support participation (Karlsson et al., 2018).

1.1. ECE Teachers' Views about Children's Participation

Identifying teachers' views and beliefs is critical for understanding classroom practices (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Patterson et al., 2012). Teachers' perspectives on participation affect the participation process, which is an indicator of the choices offered to children and the shared decisions made. Therefore, determining teachers' views on participation will also reflect the conditions for supporting participation (Correia et al., 2020).

In addition to teachers' positive views on participation (Waters-Davies, 2024), some studies conclude that their level of knowledge about child participation and their practices regarding the right to participate is insufficient (Delijeva & Ozola, 2023; Shaik, 2016). Although ECE teachers have subjective perspectives on children's images (Lämsä et al., 2017), they need support to reflect children's perspectives in their practices (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2019). Given the need for new practices and methods (Kirby, 2020) to support children's participation, teachers need to develop their professional skills (Kangas et al., 2016). For teachers to change their practices related to children's participation, they must receive training as well as develop themselves on new methods (Heikka et al., 2022; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). For this change, teachers need to self-evaluate and discuss their practices (Ojala & Venninen, 2011; Vecchi, 2010). The desire for professional development and change will lead to a change in views and actions (Malinen, 2000). Sustained professional development programs have been shown to significantly impact the quality of teacher-child interactions and the implementation of participatory practices. For instance, Rakap and Balıkcı (2024) demonstrated that coaching-based interventions increased Turkish preschool teachers' use of inclusive and participatory strategies, fostering stronger classroom engagement. Similarly, Rivas et al. (2023) highlight the role of culturally responsive training in enhancing teacher self-efficacy, which indirectly promotes participatory classroom climates.

Although there are studies in the literature to determine the views and opinions of ECE teachers in different countries on child participation (Correia et al., 2020; Heikka et al., 2022; Munongi, 2023; Venninen et al., 2014; Zorbay Varol, 2019), studies examining the effect of training prepared for teachers are quite limited. Teacher education plays a critical role in ensuring children's right to participate is recognized and upheld in classrooms. In a study examining Spanish universities, Valle-Flórez et al. (2024) found that pre-service ECE teachers often perceive a lack of specific training on children's rights, particularly on participation, which affects their confidence and practices. Similar patterns have been noted in Turkish settings, where teacher education curricula frequently omit focused content on participation (Zorbay Varol, 2019). In Türkiye, on the other hand, a study examining the impact of child participation training on teachers' views has not yet been conducted. Based on all these, this study will examine the impact of participatory pedagogy and child participation training on teachers' views on participation.

1.2. The Turkish Context: Children's Right to Participate in ECE

Türkiye, which is among the states parties to the UNCRC, is implementing different action plans and practices to legally guarantee, monitor and evaluate child participation. 11th Development Plan for 2019-2023 (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Strategy and Budget Presidency, 2019), Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2019-2023 Strategic Plan (MoNE, 2019), 2023-2028 Türkiye Child Rights Strategy Document and Action Plan (The Ministry of Family and Social Services,

2023), including regulations to realise children's right to participate in school systems (Ozturk et al., 2023). In all areas where children live, there are practices such as children's rights committees, children's assemblies of city councils and school assemblies to ensure that their views are respected and their participation in decision-making processes is ensured.

Despite all these regulations, teachers' insufficient knowledge and skills regarding child participation (Ozturk et al., 2019; Urfalıoğlu, 2019; Zorbay Varol, 2019) cause difficulties in terms of ensuring participation. This situation is explained as teachers' insufficient knowledge negatively affects their implementation (Robson, 2016). In the Higher Education Institution Teacher Training Undergraduate Program, there are courses on Education Law but there is no course on child participation. To change views and practices on child participation, it is very important to include courses on child participation in teacher training programs and to provide in-service training for teachers.

1.3. The Current Study

With the training to be prepared within the scope of this research, it is thought that teachers' knowledge and awareness levels regarding child participation will increase. Teachers' gaining knowledge and skills on how to include children in decision-making processes in ECE classrooms and how to support children's right to participate will contribute to their professional development. The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of participatory pedagogy and child participation training on ECE teachers' views on child participation. The problems of this research are as follows:

RQ 1) What are ECE teachers' views on child participation before and after participatory pedagogy and child participation training?

RQ 2) What are the experiences of ECE teachers towards realizing child participation before and after participatory pedagogy and child participation training?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

In this research, a case study, one of the qualitative research designs, was used. Case studies examine specific factors such as the environment, individuals, events, and processes related to a case in a holistic manner (Merriam, 2013). In a case study, one or more situations that are limited over time are thoroughly examined using data collection tools that include multiple sources (Creswell, 2013). This design was employed because the change in teachers' views on child participation following participatory pedagogy training was examined in a holistic and in-depth manner. Such a design is also appropriate when the research focuses on answering 'how' and 'why' questions (Yin, 2003). Therefore, in this study, the changes in teachers' practices related to child participation after the training were explored.

2.2. Study Group

Criterion sampling was used as a purposeful sampling method in this study. It was decided as a criterion that the teachers had at least five years of professional experience and no prior training in child participation. The study group consisted of 8 teachers working in an independent kindergarten affiliated to the Directorate of National Education in a province in the Aegean region of Türkiye. In this research design, the small number of participants is due to the detailed and in-depth nature of the method, as well as the selection of key informants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). All of the teachers are female and hold a bachelor's degree. One teacher has thirteen years of professional experience, one has twelve years, one has eight years, three have six years, and two have five years of experience.

Additionally, four of the teachers work with the five-year-old age group, while the other four work with the four-year-old age group. Each of the classrooms with four-year-old children has 12 students, while each of the classrooms with five-year-old children has 11 students.

2.3. Instruments

2.3.1. Interview form

In this study, a semi-structured interview form developed by Akyol and Erdem (2021) was used to determine teachers' views on child participation before and after the training. In the teacher interview form, there are 10 open-ended questions about "factors affecting child participation, practices for ensuring child participation in the classroom and problems experienced". To ensure internal validity, three field experts' perspectives on this interview were considered. In accordance with the opinions and suggestions of field experts, one question was removed from 11 and one question was changed. As part of the pilot study, two elementary teachers and two preschool teachers were interviewed, and probes were used to enrich their answers (Akyol & Erdem, 2021).

2.3.2. Reflective diary

Reflective journals were used to determine the impact of the training on teachers' experiences regarding participation processes in the classroom after the training. Through reflective journals, individuals think about and express their personal learning experiences (Bean, 2011). These journals were developed by the researcher to understand the teachers' learning and experience processes throughout the training.

2.4. Procedure of the Study

Preparation of the participatory pedagogy training consisted of a needs analysis, literature review, determination of the topics and content of the sessions, and design of session plans. Within the scope of the needs analysis, interviews were conducted with 3 ECE teachers who graduated from 4 different universities to determine whether ECE teachers have the necessary awareness of children's participation rights. After the interviews, it was determined that all of the teachers did not know the articles on the right to participate and had insufficient knowledge about the dimensions and implementation processes of child participation. After the needs analysis, national and international documents and visual resources in the relevant literature were examined and necessary information was collected. The results of the literature review and the needs analysis were compared and evaluated. After the session topics were selected, the objectives and session contents for each session were determined.

Participatory pedagogy training consists of 8 sessions. The session titles are Children's Participation, Right to Participate in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Models of Right to Participate, Children's Participation at School, Problems and Solutions Related to Children's Participation, The Role of the Teacher in Children's Participation, Participatory Methods, Examples of Practices to Support Children's Participation and General Evaluation.

In the first four sessions, theoretical information about children's participation was given and a general perspective on participatory pedagogy was tried to be gained. Interesting videos were used at the beginning of the sessions, followed by explanations and examples on the subject, and participant opinions were taken during the process. From the fifth session onwards, participatory practices were examined and participatory methods and participatory pedagogy were emphasized. At the beginning of the sessions, the activity type was discussed and sample activity plans created by the researcher were presented and discussed. Then, teachers designed examples of practices in which they used participatory methods in group work. The designed practices were analyzed through group discussion.

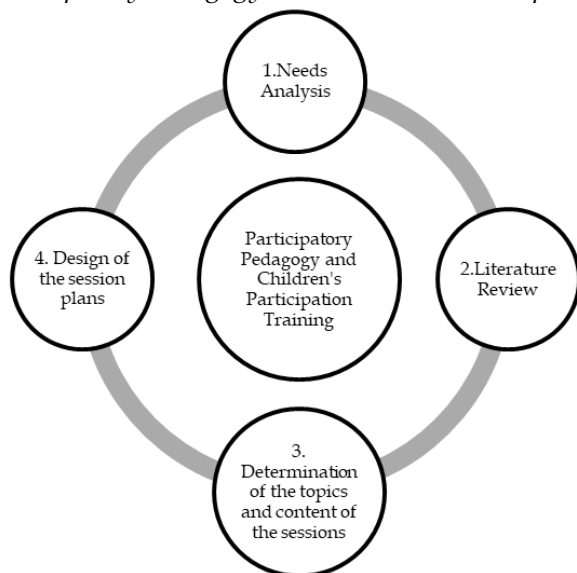
Different methods and techniques such as micro-teaching, case study, drama, discussion, question-answer, and small group work were used in the session contents, and different evaluation processes such as homework, games, material preparation, activity writing, observation were included in the evaluation part to determine whether the purpose of the relevant session was achieved. For each session, presentations, educational readings, sample applications according to stages and difficulty levels, activity plans, videos and computers were utilized.

After the Participatory Pedagogy and Children's Participation Training was prepared, it was presented to three experts in the field of preschool and child development education, and the sessions were finalized by making necessary arrangements within the framework of the feedback received. The training was delivered to the teachers for a total of four weeks, two sessions per week. The sessions were held in the meeting room of the school where the two teachers in the study group were working, as the physical conditions of the school were suitable. The sessions lasted approximately two hours. The first session lasted 90 minutes, the second 120 minutes, the third 100 minutes, and the final session 95 minutes.

Before the training, individual interviews were conducted with the teachers in the meeting room of the school on the designated date. The interviews lasted approximately 25-30 minutes and all of the interviews were recorded as all of the teachers gave their consent for audio recording. After the training, the final interviews were conducted under the same conditions. The data of the study were collected between October 2022 and December 2022. Pre-interviews were conducted between October 17 and 19, 2022. Following these interviews, Participatory Pedagogy and Child Participation Training was provided to the teachers between October 24 and November 18, 2022. Post-interviews were conducted between November 21 and 23, 2022, and reflective journals were distributed to the teachers to be completed after the training. The teachers filled out the journals between November 21 and December 10, 2022.

Figure 1

Participatory Pedagogy and Children's Participation Training Preparation Process



2.5. Ethical Consideration

The necessary permissions were obtained from the ethics committee of a Afyon Kocatepe University. The ethical elements of the study included informing the participants about the purpose of the study, obtaining informed consent forms, and ensuring data confidentiality and privacy. The participants were informed about the research in advance, and it was stated that they could withdraw at any time. The teachers who signed the consent form saying that they volunteered to participate in the research were included in the study.

2.6. Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to analyze the data obtained. Fraenkel and Wallen (2005) stated that content analysis is a technique that reveals the beliefs, attitudes and ideas of individuals participating in the research. In this study, the steps of content analysis developed by Kuckartz (2019) were (a) data preparation, (b) determining the main themes appropriate to the questions in the interview form, (c) coding the data by the main themes, (d) determining sub-themes, (e) data

interpretation, and (f) reporting. In the first stage, the data obtained were organized and the interviews, which were converted into written texts, were pre-screened. In the second stage, it was decided to use the themes of the research in which the same interview form was included. In the third stage, the data were coded in line with the themes, and in the fourth stage, sub-themes appropriate to the main themes were formed based on the coding. It was decided to replace the activities sub-theme in the sub-theme of the classroom practices theme with the options sub-theme. In addition, an independent researcher reviewed the codes and themes and a consensus was reached about the themes. In the fifth stage, the findings obtained in line with the themes were interpreted and the results were reported in the sixth stage.

In this study, strategies such as long-term interaction, in-depth data collection, data triangulation, participant confirmation and expert review were used to ensure credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The researcher read and reviewed the interview transcripts several times and had long-term interactions with the data sources. Necessary information was provided to the participants of the study and participant confirmations were also provided by presenting consent forms. In the quotations made in this study, the names of the participants were not used due to ethical considerations and the interviewed preschool teachers were coded as E1, E2, E3, etc.

Opinions and experiences were described in detail and the processes regarding the authenticity of the data were presented to the readers together with the quotations. Field experts were consulted in the preparation of the interview form and necessary arrangements were made. For consistency, attention was paid to collecting the research data under the same conditions, recording the collected data and associating the data with the results (Creswell, 2013). In addition, the data were analyzed twice, leaving a one-month time frame.

For the reliability of the study, the interview transcripts were read one by one by the researcher and another independent researcher and coding was done. During the coding process, the codes and the data were constantly compared and it was ensured that there was no change in the meaning of the codes (Gibbs, 2007). The reliability formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used to calculate the reliability between the coders ($\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Agreement}}{\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}}$). Inter-coder reliability was calculated as .81.

3. Results

The findings of the pre- and post-interviews and reflective diaries were categorized under four themes. The themes and sub-themes are given in Table 1. The sub-themes related to the themes are given as headings with quotations from the teachers' views.

Table 1

Themes and Sub-themes

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>
Participation	• Cases • Factors
Decision-making	• Decisions are taken together • Benefits • Difficulties
Expressing views	• States • Methods
Classroom practices	• Options • Competencies

3.1. Participation

3.1.1. Cases

In the pre-interviews, five of the ECE teachers defined participation as being involved in activities, two as children expressing their opinions, and one as being free. In the post-interviews, four

teachers defined participation as children having the opportunity to choose, three as children expressing their opinions, and one as children being involved in activities. While E2 defined participation as “participation in games” in the pre-interviews, in the post-interviews she defined it as “the child saying what they want to do and the teacher supporting them”. While E5 defined participation as “participation in activities” in the pre-interview, in the post-interview she referred to children's autonomy as “children participating or continuing the activity on their own will”. Another teacher emphasized the opportunity for children to choose in the final interview; “The teacher can ask children to make a choice instead of choosing the book they want” (E8).

3.1.2. Factors

In the pre-interviews, two of the teachers stated that friends, two teachers, two friends, and two others stated that developmental characteristics affected participation. In the final interviews, four of the teachers stated that the teacher, two of them stated that the program, one of them stated that friends and one of them stated that family factors affected participation.

While E1 said “I think the family is effective” in the pre-interview, in the post-interview, she stated that the teacher influenced it by saying “The more freedom the teacher gives and respects the rights of the child, the more freely the child can express his/her ideas”. E4 explained her changing views on the role of the teacher after the training she received.

A teacher who does not go beyond the rules affects the child's right to participate to a great extent. Before this training, I was a very rule-bound educator. After taking this seminar, I learned that children also have the right to choose for themselves.

3.2. Decision-making

3.2.1. Decisions are taken together

In the pre-interview results related to this sub-theme, teachers stated that they decided on the type of activity, classroom rules, and playtime together with the children. Three teachers stated that they decided on the playtime together with the children, three teachers decided on the classroom rules, and one of them decided on the materials used in the classroom. One teacher stated that she made the decisions herself. In the post-interview, five of the teachers stated that they decided on the content of the program, two on the classroom rules, and one on the playtime.

In the pre-interview, E7 stated that they created the classroom rules together with the children as follows: “At the beginning of the semester, we create a rule chart together with the children”. In the post-interview, E7 stated, “We can plan together which activities we can do at the beginning of the day in the morning”. E3, who said that she made the decisions alone, “I usually make the decisions”, explained in the last interview that she started to make decisions in the classroom with the children by saying, “We have a box in the form of a cube during circle time, we throw the box on the floor, we chat about whichever side comes from the pictures there.” While E2 drew attention to a teacher-centred process before the training by saying “We have certain rules in the classroom, I don't leave them to the children”, after the training she said, “We make decisions together with the children in games and music activities”.

Reflective diary entries demonstrated that teachers increasingly involved children in classroom decisions, particularly in areas such as story selection and planning activities. Teachers' reflections highlighted how they began to co-construct classroom activities with children. For instance, teachers reported collaboratively planning art activities and choosing music with children. These experiences reinforced the idea that shared decision-making not only empowered children but also increased teachers' satisfaction and sense of connection with children. These diary insights support the interview results where teachers expressed a greater emphasis on joint decision-making processes after training. In this context, E5 stated, “Children were involved in deciding which songs to play while dancing at school. Seeing them happy made me happy too...” Similarly, E7 remarked, “We decided on the art activity together with the children... I was happy when we made the decision together...”

3.2.2. Benefits

In the pre-interviews, four of the teachers stated that children were motivated when they made decisions together, and four of them stated that their social-emotional development was supported. In the final interviews, six teachers stated that children were motivated and two of them stated that making decisions together positively affected their social-emotional development. While E7 explained that children were motivated when they made decisions in the pre-interview as "They participate more happily and willingly", in the post-interview she stated that decision-making supported children's sense of self-efficacy as "They learn to make decisions by thinking about the consequences of the decisions they make...". In the pre-interview, E6 mentioned the contribution of decision-making to children's self-concept by saying, "They feel that I am valuable when they come to school". In the post-interview, she stated that children were able to express their opinions by saying, "It allows children to express themselves freely".

One of the teachers noted in the diary that when the children's opinions were taken into account, there was a noticeable increase in their curiosity, enthusiasm, and participation. E2 asserted that, "I asked the children's opinion about choosing a story. They were very curious and excited when I asked their opinions."

3.2.3. Difficulties

Before the training, four of the teachers reported difficulties with requests, three with authority and one with voting when making decisions with children. After the training, four of the teachers stated that they had difficulties with voting, three with requests and one with authority.

E6 said in the pre-interview that she had difficulties in terms of requests, "The most *difficult point is that everyone wants something different.*" In the post-interview, she explained the solution she found to the difficulty she encountered while voting as, "If we are doing verbal voting, I may have some difficulties if the children are equal in terms of preference. We can find a solution to this; we can do both during the day..."

Another teacher stated in the last interview that she had difficulties with requests; "I have difficulties because everyone prefers and chooses different things because everyone wants what they want" (E2).

3.3. Expressing Views

3.3.1. States

When the results of the pre-interviews were analyzed, four of the teachers stated that children were able to express their opinions about everything in the classroom, three of them expressed their opinions about emotions and one of them expressed their opinions about activities. In the post-interview, four teachers stated that children expressed their opinions about activities, two about routines and the other two about everything. E5 explained that children were able to express their emotions in the pre-interview as follows: "If the child is unhappy that day, he can clearly explain why he is unhappy." In the post interview, she stated that they expressed their opinions about the activities; "They can easily say whether they like the activity or not. Because I ask their opinions."

The diaries revealed that when children felt heard, they were more emotionally expressive and confident in sharing their thoughts. This supports the interview findings, where teachers indicated that children began to articulate their likes, dislikes, and emotional states more clearly.

3.3.2. Methods

In the pre-interviews, five of the teachers stated that they used the question-answer method, one used the hourglass, and one used voting while making decisions with the children. In the post-interviews, two teachers used question-answer, two teachers used games, two teachers used role play, one teacher used drawings and one teacher used scamper technique.

E1 explained that she took the opinions of the children by voting in the pre-interview by saying, "When we choose a book by voting, we read that book." In the post interview, she said that she used the scamper technique, "There is free thinking in scamper activities, for example, I give a topic, the children say their ideas about that topic..." E4 explained the methods she used in the decision-making process, "They make pictures. They share with their friends during circle time."

3.4. Classroom Practices

3.4.1. Options

In the pre-interviews, four of the teachers stated that they gave children choices about materials, two about the daily program, and two about routines. In the post-interviews, five teachers stated that they offered choices about the program, two about the materials, and one about the routines. While E6 stated in the pre-interview that she gave options related to materials by saying "They can choose the color of the scissors during the activity", in the last interview she said "They can choose the story to be read that day." She stated that children started to offer options related to the processes in the program.

E8 explained the option she presented in the pre-interview about field trips "I ask the children, where do you think we should go this month? Where are you curious about?". In the post-interview, she talked about the options in the program content; "We said let's play a game with music in the classroom, they decided on the game and music" (E8).

One common theme in the diaries was a recognition of the importance of reorganizing the classroom environment and routines to better support child agency. One teacher wrote that after organizing the classroom environment with all the children, she felt like a participant rather than an authority figure. Another highlighted that supporting children's participation led to increased happiness and autonomy among students, which also positively affected her emotional well-being as a teacher. E4 stated, "We made arrangements in the classroom environment with all the children. Since everyone participated, I felt myself as a participant rather than an authority in the classroom" while E8 highlighted "I felt that when we free children and support participation, we see them happier and that makes me very happy."

Teachers felt that this shift created a more democratic atmosphere in which both teachers and children experienced mutual satisfaction and enjoyment. This aligns with the interview findings, which showed a shift in teachers' understanding of participation—from passive involvement to active choice-making.

3.4.2. Competences

Before the training, four of the teachers found themselves inadequate, two found themselves moderately adequate, and one found himself/herself well adequate in child participation. After the training, six of the teachers reported that they started to consider themselves as good, two as moderately competent and one as moderately competent.

One of the teachers explained why she considered herself inadequate before the training by stating "There may be some situations where I interfere too much with the child's right to participation. Since your program is busy, I can intervene too much in participation rights". The same teacher explained that her views and practices changed after the training.

Before the seminar, I thought I was insufficient in terms of child participation. After the training, I try to provide a little more free time and try to ensure their participation and take their ideas more.

In the post-interview, E4 expressed her views that changed after the training as follows: "I think it was enough after the training. Yes, I had shortcomings when I criticized myself, but now I have more knowledge. We enabled children to express themselves freely with this training...". While E6 expressed her competence in child participation in the pre-interview as "I don't think it is very sufficient at the moment, it is at a medium level", she explained the effect of the training in the post-interview;

Before the training, I considered myself more inadequate, but in the training, we saw the reasons, and we saw good examples. We saw different practices, so I think I am good now.

Teachers expressed their satisfaction with the training in their diaries. One teacher stated that the training clarified the roles and approaches necessary for children's participation, while another stated that it helped them transition from a teacher-centered approach to a child-centered approach. This shows a transformation not only in practice but also in pedagogical beliefs.

Teachers' views on the training are given below:

I think this training was useful in terms of which roles and approaches we should have in child participation. (E1)

Before participating in the training, we used to do the activities that I determined myself without going beyond the activity. After participating in the training, I try to do it by taking the ideas of the children. (E3)

4. Discussion

Because many legal regulations and curricula include children's participation principles, ECE teachers require the necessary support to ensure participation in practice (Correia et al., 2020). After the training, it was observed that teachers gave more examples of children's choices and opinions in the classroom in situations where participation was ensured. It can be said that teachers who gave examples of processes in which children were active also changed their understanding of children (Lansdown et al., 2014). For children's participation rights to be realized, adults need to see children as social actors whose interests and skills affect their own lives (Lansdown, 2005). To create a culture of participation in early childhood education, an understanding of the active image of the child must be provided (Weckström, Karlsson, et al., 2021). It was found that that early childhood education [ECE] teachers' beliefs about children's capacities (Correia et al., 2019) and how they support children's autonomy (Waters-Davies, 2024) were associated with high levels of child participation. It was concluded that teachers who support participation have the view that children realize their rights through their capacities, powers, and agency (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2019). Similar to this study, teachers explained participation as children making choices (Broström et al., 2015) and being involved in decision-making and planning processes (Zorec, 2015). In this study, teachers expressed different opinions about the factors affecting participation such as the teacher and the program implemented after the training. It can be said that teachers gained awareness that ECE components affect participation in addition to the child's characteristics. In the literature, it is stated that environmental factors such as schedules, routines and materials, learning environment (Knauf, 2019; Mesquita-Pires, 2012), and programs with different content (Çelik & Kamaraj, 2020; Weckstrom, Lastikka et al., 2021) positively affect children's participation.

The teachers who participated in the current study stated that after the participation training, they started to make decisions about the program together with the children in the classroom and the number of situations in which they made decisions increased. Considering that co-decision-making is an important component of participation in ECE (Lansdown, 2020), it can be said that teachers started to take children's thoughts, feelings, and ideas more into account and support their autonomy (Correia et al., 2019). In addition, it is thought that teachers' belief in children's capacities in decision-making processes increased before the training and they started to overcome the concern that their authority would decrease when they gave control to children (Lundy, 2007). In the literature, it has been reported that teachers think that children's participation in discussions in decision-making processes (Kangas et al., 2016; Turnšek & Pekkarinen, 2009; Venninen & Leinonen, 2013) supports participation. In high-quality ECE settings, children were given more opportunities to make decisions (Houen et al., 2016), whereas in low-quality settings, teachers alone made most decisions (Lopes et al., 2016). In this study, after the training, the number of teachers who stated that they had difficulties in decision-making during voting increased, while the number of teachers who stated that they had difficulties in ensuring children's wishes and

authority decreased. It can be said that as teachers' images of children become active, responsible and capable of decision-making (Huić, 2022), the situations in which they make decisions together with children increase, and the difficulties they experience in the decision-making process decrease, that is, how they support participation begin to become concrete. Teachers who involve children in decision-making processes are reported to care more about children's right to participation (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2019; Urinboyev et al., 2016). It was concluded that teachers who were less controlling in classroom management (Penović, 2021), and who involved children in decision-making about classroom rules and procedures (Thornberg, 2009), and space arrangements in the classroom (Thoyibi et al., 2021) had positive views on participation. Teachers' views on the benefits of decision-making did not change. Before and after the training, they stated that decision-making motivated children and supported their social-emotional development. This can be explained by the fact that although teachers have positive views on decision-making, their awareness of the multidimensional effects of decision-making has begun to emerge. Similar to this result, Correia et al. (2020) stated that teachers explained the benefits of participation in a limited way as autonomy, self-confidence, and thinking skills, so their awareness of the broader social benefits of participation should be increased. In another study, it was determined that teachers saw positive effects such as self-confidence, communication, and cooperation as the benefits of participation for children (Nah & Lee, 2016).

In the current study, after participating in the training, teachers reported that the number of topics on which children expressed their opinions in the classroom increased. Teachers stated that while children's opinions about activities were limited before the training, after the training they expressed their opinions on different topics such as activities and routines. Considering that how children's opinions are taken into account is as important as how they express their opinions (Lundy, 2007), it is noteworthy that teachers gave concrete examples of how children's opinions affect the processes. Taking children's views into account may cause some teachers to fear that they will lose their authority (Cassidy et al., 2014). Contrary to the studies that concluded that children's opinions were not taken into account, especially regarding daily plans (Alasuutari, 2014), there are studies that emphasize that children's opinions can be taken in all situations that concern children instead of limiting participation (Horgan et al., 2017).

It has been concluded that participation is achieved when teachers are less controlling and set classroom rules together with children (Emilson & Folkesson 2006; Sandberg & Erikson, 2010). After the training prepared within the scope of this study, ECE teachers stated that they started to use child-centered and participatory methods such as role playing and drawings to get children's opinions. While listening to children's voices, it is emphasized that child-centered methods should be used rather than adult-centered methods (Urbina-Garcia et al., 2022) and visual methods are effective (Clark, 2020; Wall, 2017). Studies in the literature that conclude that different communication methods applied by teachers (Houen et al., 2016; Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2019; Weckström, Lastikk, et al., 2021) support children's agency support the results of this study.

The teachers participating in the current study stated that the number of options they offered to children regarding the daily program and activities increased after the training. This result can be seen as a positive development considering that teachers who offer different options to children and take their feelings and opinions into account (Casey et al., 2019; Church & Bateman, 2019; Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001) support participation. Not giving children choices in the classroom is seen as a social problem as well as limiting participation (Kosher & Gross-Manos, 2024). In high-quality ECE settings, on the other hand, children are given more choices and opportunities for participation are increased (Sheridan, 2007). It has also been concluded that children's sense of autonomy is supported and they are happier in classrooms where they can make free choices (Correia & Aguiar, 2017; Sandseter & Seland, 2016).

In this study, after the participation training, most of the teachers stated that they started to find themselves professionally competent in child participation. This shows that the training provided within the scope of the research was effective in supporting teachers' professional development.

Teachers who adopt a child-centred approach support children's participation rights more (Huić, 2022). Teachers need to develop their professional skills in participatory methods to support child participation (Kangas et al., 2016; Zorbay Varol, 2019). Teachers should take advantage of professional development opportunities that focus on teacher-child interaction and knowledge about children's agency to support children's participation and raise awareness about barriers to participation (Correia et al., 2020). Professional development should include ensuring the participation of children of different age groups, ethnicity, developmental characteristics, and disabilities (Almqvist & Almqvist 2015; Kangas, 2016; Sairanen et. al., 2020) and participatory practices (Venninen & Leinonen, 2013). Some studies concluded that teachers' views and practices on children's rights changed positively after the child rights training (Bal, 2019; Ozdemir Doğan, 2017). It was found that early childhood pre-service teachers' awareness of participation increased after receiving training on child participation (Araújo, 2022; Avgitidou et al., 2024; Shaik, 2022).

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

In this study, it was determined that children expressed their opinions on more issues. It was concluded that teachers started to make decisions together with children about the program implemented and their views on the benefits of decision-making did not change. In addition, the teachers stated that after the training, they started to offer more options to children and to find themselves professionally competent in child participation. In the current study, it was seen that teachers were able to reflect the information they learned within the scope of the training they attended to the program they implemented, their routines in the classroom, and their interactions with children. The study concludes that participatory pedagogy training had a positive impact on teachers' perceptions and classroom practices related to child participation. Based on the results of this research, in-service trainings and seminars on children's participation can be organized for ECE teachers and ECE professionals. Courses and practices on child participation and participatory pedagogy can be added to teacher training programs. Research on children's participation, including teacher training of different duration and scope, can be diversified. This study is limited to ECE teachers working in a provincial centre in the Aegean region of Türkiye. Future studies can be conducted with teachers working at different levels of education in different cities and regions. The data collection tools of this study are limited to the interview form and reflective diaries. In future studies, multiple data collection tools such as scales and observation forms can be used to examine teachers' practices towards child participation in detail through in-class observations. In addition, one of the limitations of this study is that only ECE teachers were included as participants and the opinions of children and families, who are the components of the child participation process, were not taken. Multidimensional evaluations of child participation training can be realized by taking the opinions of children and families.

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Data availability: The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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