THE CURRENT STATUS OF IN-SERVICE TRAININGS FOR TEACHERS AND EXPECTATIONS: DO THEY MATCH?

(Research article)

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Abstract

Taking into consideration the INSETs' direct influence on teachers' professional development and indirect influence on the education, the present study aims to find out teachers' views about in -service training activities and their proposed solutions to improve the effectiveness of the in-service training activities through the semi- structured and in-depth interviews. Moreover, the latest statistics of in-service trainings in Turkey was examined with holistic and critical approach. 59 teachers from three different types of school (primary, secondary, junior high school) in Turkey participated in the study. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview, and analyzed through content analysis by searching for patterns and synthesizing them. NVivo 8 was used to code the transcriptions and to derive broader themes shaped around core meanings and then to group together (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While the most useful aspects of in-service training programs are found as professional development, meeting new people and professional development, weaknesses of in-service training programs are poor planning, lack of qualified trainers and lack of practical implications according to teacher opinions. Teachers suggested that employing expert trainers, effective planning and more interactive contents are crucial for an ideal INSET activity. The study concludes with possible reasons for the problems in concern, and practical implications.

Keywords: Teaching Profession, Professional Development, In-Service Training, Teachers.

1. Introduction

In-service training can be defined as a training that makes individuals who are working in a particular job acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding their duties (Taymaz, 1997; Pehlivan, 1997). To increase the knowledge, skills and positive beliefs of teachers, in-service training is considered as an effective method. The Education Information Network in the European Union (EURYDICE) defines in-service training as 'a variety of activities and practices in which teachers become involved in order to broaden their

knowledge, improve their skills and assess and develop their professional approach (Perron,1991). It has an important role in professional development of teachers by improving their knowledge in an organized program and it aims to improve the performance of the personnel in school setting. Positive effects of in-service trainings on teachers' professional and personal development by increasing positive attitudes and self-confidence are stated. Also it helps teachers broaden their knowledge about new theories and curriculum content and to develop their skills and teaching practices (Freeman,1989;Joyce & Showers,1980). Also, INSET courses improve the successful implementation of curriculum innovations and the quality of education (Hayes,1995; Budak, 1998; Hayes,2000; Boydak &Dikici, 2001; Seferoğlu, 2004; Lieberman and Pointer-Mace, 2008; Odabaşı-Çimer et al., 2010).

Teachers need in-service trainings to complete their shortcomings before beginning their profession and after they begin teaching. In particular, it can be claimed that in-service training is obligatory especially for novice teachers because of the lack of adequate experience regarding the teaching profession, inability to comply with changes and developments, the necessity to learn some knowledge and skills only on the job, the desire of personal development (Selimoğlu &Yılmaz, 2009). Although they have an important role, they need to be included within a larger educational policy model which necessitates the active involvement and cooperation of key educational agents (Nicolaidis & Mattheoudakis, 2008; Gökdere and Çepni, 2004; Sandholtz, 2002).

Organization and financial support of pre-service and in-service teacher training programs in Turkey have been managed by Teacher Training Department of MoNE since 1960. In this respect, the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE) is responsible for running teachers professional development through the in-service training. The in-service teacher trainings aim to empower individuals in their professionals, to develop professionalism and skills of lifelong learning, to make their adaptation to the changes and to improve their required performance (MoNE, 2011).

Gültekin and Çubukcu (2008) in their studies about primary education teachers' opinions on in-service training suggested that qualitative research should be done to examine different aspects of the issue. This paper specifically aims to analyze the latest statistics of in-service trainings in Turkey with holistic and critical approach and it tries to find out teachers' opinions about in -service training activities and their proposed solutions of what can be done to improve the effectiveness of the in-service training activities through the semi- structured and in-depth interviews to provide deeper insight about in-service trainings in Turkey. Based on the aim, this study seeks for responses to the following research questions:

1)   What is the current situation of INSETs in Turkey regarding statistics released by MoNE?

2)   What are the strengths and weaknesses of INSET according to teachers' opinions?

3)   What are the teachers' suggestions about ideal INSET program?

2. Literature Review

The changes and developments in science, technology and society cause the inadequacy of education in the educational institutions. Rapid development and changes in the modern times have brought along the need for more qualified human power. Depending on these developments, the term "lifelong education" has become more important not only for individuals but also for all kinds of social organizations. INSETs are one of the most

important programs that organizations prefer to use to develop their personnel (Neo and Wilk,1993; Yalın, 2001).

In-service training is expected to increase the quality of the products / services produced by workers who are informed in terms of job requirements, professional knowledge and professional ethics and labor productivity (Sieben, 2007). In-service training improves the skills of the occupation, enhances the knowledge and experience, and earns competence in the workplace. In-service training makes it easier for newcomers to learn and adapt to the workplace while facilitating compliance with changes in existing occupations and refreshing their professional knowledge. In this sense, in service training is seen as an investment that enhances the institution's flexibility to change. Because educated workforce through in-service training can manage change easily and surely, this will help the organization expand (Aytaç, 2000; Gül, 2000; Bryan, 2006; Kaya et al.,2006; Selimoğlu &Yılmaz, 2009).

Uysal (2012) examined one-week INSET to scrutinize its effect on language teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and classroom practices. It was found that despite its limitations especially in terms of planning and evaluation phases, and its impact on teachers' practices, the teachers' attitudes were positive towards the course in general.

Kavak et al. (2012) examined primary and secondary school teachers' opinions about in-service teacher training programs in Turkey. 681 teachers from 26 different schools in Ankara participated in the study and the data were collected through In-service Teacher Training Inventory (ITTI) developed by Yamak et al. (2011). The results of the study revealed that teachers do not prefer distance learning despite their internet access and having computers at home. They want the trainings conducted by university lecturers who are experts in their fields in their own schools and during working hours.

In another study, Bozkurt et al (2012) found out curriculum, drama and theatre, scientific developments in their own fields were among the popular subjects that teachers want to receive in trainings. Conducting a needs analysis is suggested by the teachers for a better planned training. Especially in terms of the quality of the instructors, teaching methods, duration of the trainings and after course support, INSET courses were found to be ineffective (Çimer et al., 2010). For effective INSET courses it was suggested that at the end of the courses evaluation should be done.

The problems found in the studies are "insufficient number of INSET courses" (Küçüksüleymanoğlu, 2006); "top-down structure of the courses imposing topics and content selected by others" (Bayrakçı, 2009; Odabaşı-Çimer et al., 2010; Özer,2004); "presentation of the programs in forms of short "one-shot" courses" (Daloğlu, 2004); "implementation of transmission methods without allowing teachers to reflect on their experiences, participate in learning, and collaborate with peers" (Bayrakçı,2009;Özer,2004); and "lack of follow-up support and evaluation mechanisms" (Bayrakçı, 2009 cited in Uysal, 2012). Furthermore, Ilğan (2013), Yiğit and Altun (2011), Nartgün (2006) reported that most of the INSET courses for teachers are theoretically predominant and the teachers' needs and requests are ignored. In fact, INSET programs in Turkey have some similar problems with other INSET programs in different countries. For instance, Harris, Cale & Musson (2012), Little (1993), Miller (1998), Sandholtz (2002), Ho & Yip (2003), Fickel (2002) assert that the INSET programs are lack of practical implications and teachers are not active in these programs. In this perspective, defining the problems regarding INSET programs and finding solutions to these problems based on the perceptions of teachers can be useful to organize more effective INSET programs and the findings of this specific research can give a general idea to the policy makers in education all around the world.

3. Method

A sample of 59 teachers with different years of professional experience (23 primary, 18 secondary school and 18 junior high school teachers) from 3 different schools participated in this study. Moreover, all of the teachers participated in at least 3 in-service teacher trainings in their professional life.

Semi-structured and in-depth interviews were used to collect the data. The interview consisted of demographical and open-ended questions (e.g., what are your suggestions regarding in-service trainings' improvement?). After taking the opinions of experts in the field, the interview questions were revised and then piloted. The data were computerized, read and coded by the researchers, and were analysed through content analysis by searching for patterns and synthesizing them. The transcriptions were coded through NVivo 8 and then were grouped together to "derive broader themes shaped around core meanings" (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In addition to the interviews, the latest statistics of in-service trainings were also analysed and inferences were made with reference to existing literature and the results of this study. Lastly, the reliability of the study was ensured by using multiple strategies for the credibility (e.g. expert opinions), transferability (e.g., purposive sampling).

Table 1. *Distribution of Teachers According to School Types*

Schools	Number of Teachers
Primary School	23
Secondary School	18
Junior High School	18
Total	59

As seen in Table, 1 nearly equal number of teachers from three different types of schools participated in the study. Collecting data from different types of schools may facilitate interpretation and generalization.

Table 2. *Demographic Information about Participants*

Gender	Number of Teachers	Age Interval	Seniority	Number of Attended INSET Courses
Female	30	24- 49	2-29	3-25
Male	29	29- 64	3-28	3-25

As seen in Table 2, an equal number of male and female teachers took part in the current research. Age of the participants ranges from 23 to 50 and they have worked as a teacher from 1 to 27 years. That's both novice and experienced teachers participated in the study and share their opinions about INSETs. Moreover, the participants attended at least three INSETs. Table 3 shows the distribution of the participants according to their subjects.

Table 3. *Distribution of Participants' subjects*

Field	Number of teachers
Turkish	3
English	11
Social Sciences	4
Primary	17
Science	5
Guidance	4
Turkish Literature	3
Special Education	3
Arabic	1
Art	1
History	1
Music	1
Maths	5
Total	59

As seen in Table 3, the number of English and Primary school teachers is more than the other teachers because the majority of the personnel in primary schools are primary school teachers. Moreover, English teachers are more willing to participate in the study when compared to other teachers.

4. Findings

The first question of the survey investigated the current situation of INSETs in Turkey regarding statistics released by MoNE. Table 4 illustrates the number of centrally and locally organized INSETs in 2015 and 2016.

Table 4. *Number of Centrally and Locally organised INSET activities in 2015 and 2016*

Year	Centrally organized Inset Number	Locally organized Inset Number	Total
2015	23.669	341.354	365.023
2016	22.665	632.832	655.497

As seen in Table 4 INSETs activities are usually organized face to face. However, there are also distance INSETs organized by MONE. In 2016, 1.729.016 teachers participated in both face to face and distance INSETs. INSETs are still held especially in problematic areas such as leadership and classroom management, proficiency, teaching methods and techniques, testing and evaluation, material development, communication skills, using technology effectively and efficiently, foreign language, and professional ethics. (MONE 2017a). Current number of teachers with the latest appointment is nearly one million in Turkey. In December 2016, the number of teachers is 900.511. 447.638 teachers have been appointed in the last ten years. The average age of teachers is 37, 04 which makes Turkey a country with the youngest teachers among OECD countries (MEB 2017b). When the current number of teachers and the number of INSETs taken into consideration, the increase in quantity is significant. However, there is still discussion about the quality of INSETs. According to MONE (2017b) strategy report, MONE improves the quality of INSETs according to needs and does

research and analysis about the needs of teachers' professional development while keeping up with international developments and innovations. It also aims to improve the quantity and quality of INSETs and encourage all of the teachers to participate in these trainings with the help of distance education for the next term.

The second question scrutinized the teachers' opinions about strengths and weaknesses of INSETs. Figure 1 shows the opinions of teachers about the strengths of INSETs.
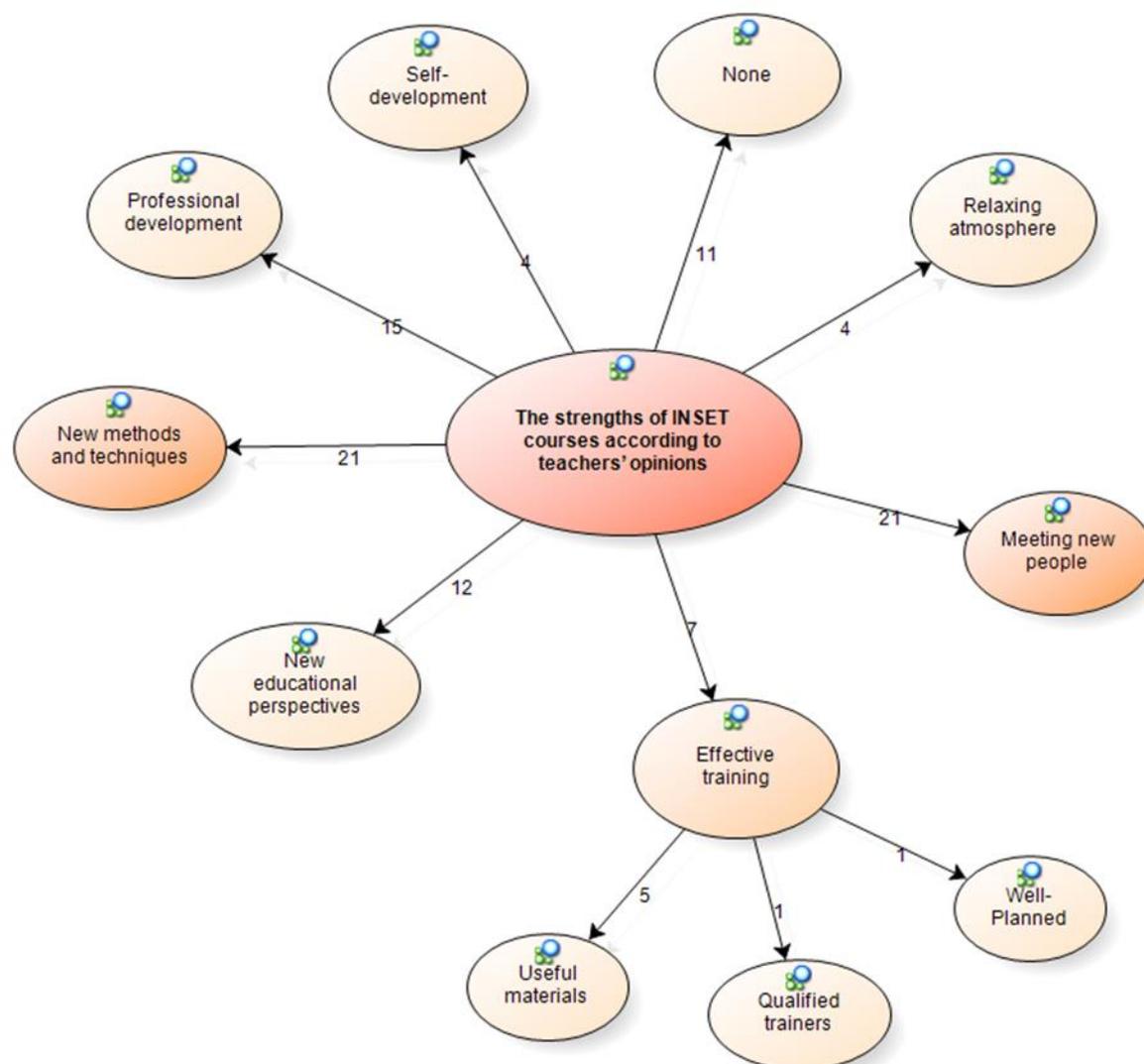

Figure 1. The strengths of INSET activities

In the study, 95 different opinions were gathered from the participants and eight groups were created based on their responses and displayed in Figure 1. Based on the responses, learning new techniques and methods and meeting new people are the most important strengths of INSETs. Participants stated INSETs contributed to their professional development and they had the opportunity to learn about new educational perspectives. However, eleven participants mentioned there aren't any strengths of INSETs, two teachers state:

"We learn new information about our field, education system and new methods and techniques. As a result, we renew ourselves and we also share methods and techniques with each other." (T 18).

"The most important strength of INSETs is that we feel important and it empowers us. We learn specific information about education and we find opportunity to renew ourselves. It changes our perspective and it specifically helped me in classroom management and communication with students." (T31).

The weaknesses of INSET activities were categorized under different themes based on their responses and displayed in Figure 2.
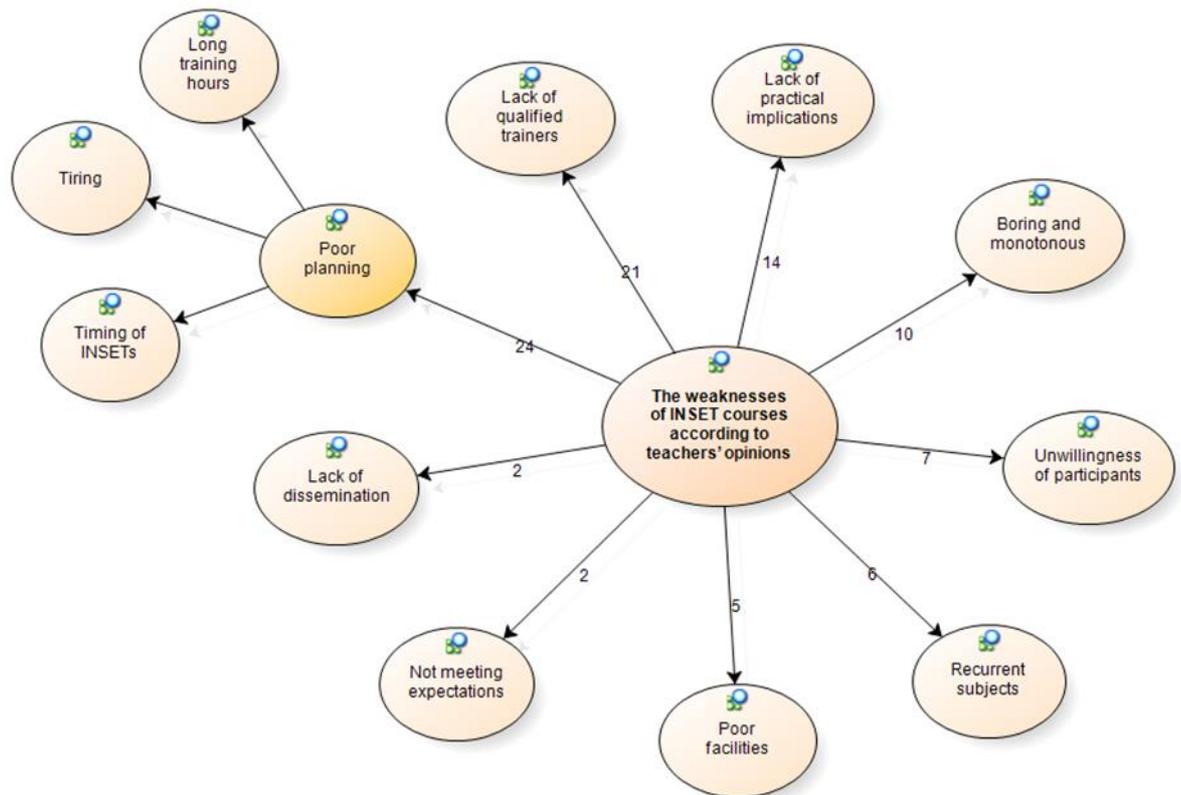

Figure 2. The weaknesses of INSET activities

186 different opinions were gathered from the participants and nine groups were created based on their responses, which is more than the strengths of INSETs. Based on the responses, poor planning and timing of INSETs, long training hours, tiring content of the courses were mentioned under poor planning.

The second most mentioned weakness of INSETs was the lack of qualified trainers. 21 opinions were stated about it and choosing the trainers among the experts was strongly recommended by the participants. Lack of practical implications, boring and monotonous trainings, and unwillingness of participants, recurrent subjects, poor facilities, not meeting expectations and lack of dissemination were also among the weaknesses of INSETs. Two teachers explained their opinions as following:

"Since some trainers are not expert in their field, we have difficulty in following the course. They just read the texts in their hands and tries to finish the course in a hurry. They

are not well-prepared for the training and there is lack of visual materials. There are also many technical problems such as not opening videos, or electricity failure." (T9)

"While choosing the content of the trainings, theoretical contents are preferred over practical subjects. Timing of the trainings is not suitable for us, they usually take place during the term when the schedule is very busy. Moreover, while choosing the participants, willing teachers should be prioritized. Compulsory trainings are not useful for us."(25)

Lastly, the teachers' suggestions were asked about an ideal INSET program. 97 different opinions identified by them were divided into eleven groups, as shown in Figure3.
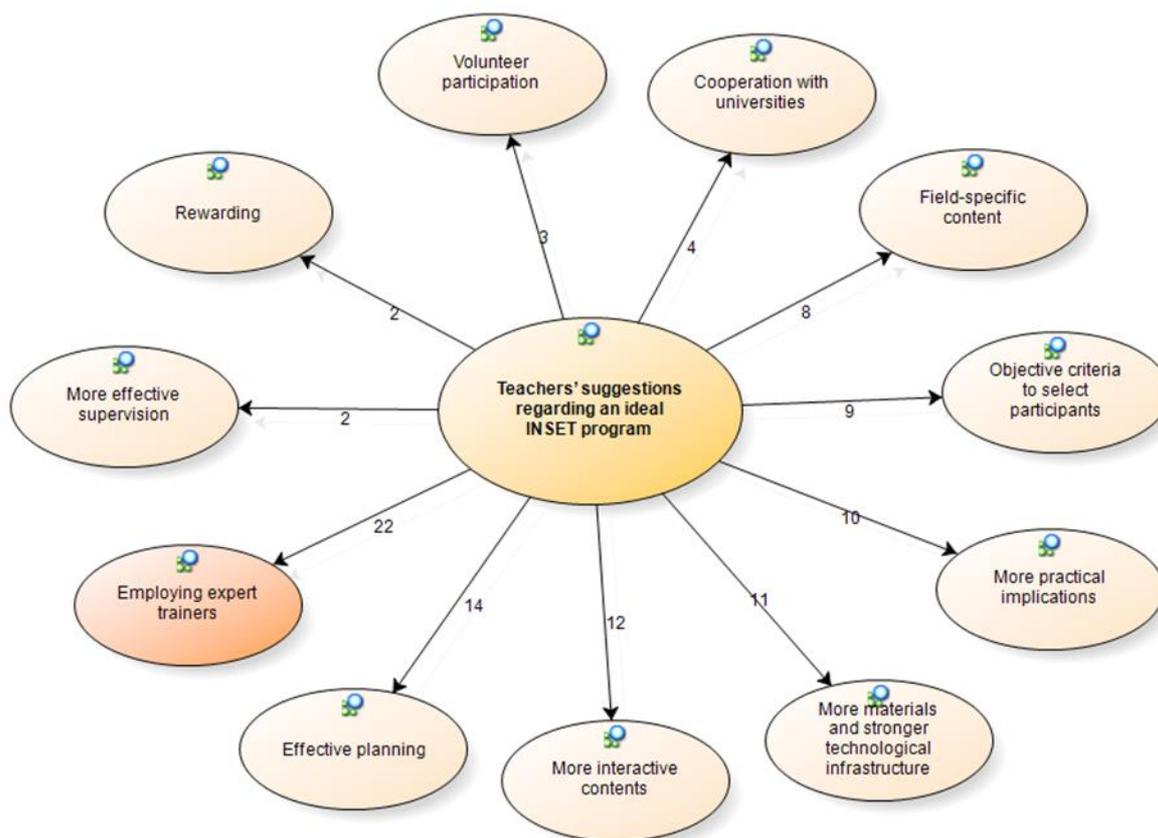

Figure 3. Teacher suggestions on INSET activities

According to Figure 3, participants are of the opinion that trainers who are experts in their field should be appointed for INSETs. As a result, trainings can be much more fruitful and informative. They also suggest cooperation with universities in choosing trainers. The second most important suggestion for an ideal INSET program is effective planning.14 teachers mentioned this idea and they added timing of trainings should be suitable for the participants, content should be interesting and have practical implications for the classroom. INSET should be interactive and the participants should be encouraged for active participation. Cooperation with universities, choosing the participants with objective criteria, and the places with good facilities and technological equipment are the issues stated by the participants. Also, two of the participants suggested an inspection and reward system that could help improvement of INSETs. The following extracts are intended to illustrate suggestions:

"In trainings, there should be practical information, methods and techniques which can be applied in the classroom. Trainers should be well-prepared for teaching. Also training should be enriched with visual materials such as videos, posters to make training more interesting. Trainers should create an environment where we can discuss our ideas." (T34)

"Choosing voluntary participants based on objective criteria make trainings more effective. Trainers should be chosen from universities not MONE. Trainings should be more enjoyable and there should be more social activities." (T6).

5.Conclusion and Discussion

This qualitative study aimed to find out strengths and weaknesses of INSETs and suggestions of teachers for an ideal INSET. 59 teachers from three different kinds of schools in Kahramanmaraş city centre participated in the study. Purposive sampling was used for group selection and the main criterion for group selection was teachers' attendance to at least three INSETs.

When INSETs held by MONE were examined, it was found that both central and local 365.023 INSETs in 2015 and 655.497 in 2016 in total were held by MONE. In 2016, with distance trainings 1.729.016 teachers attended INSETs. Training subjects were leadership and classroom management, proficiency, teaching methods and techniques, testing and evaluation, material development, communication skills, using technology effectively and efficiently, foreign language, and professional ethics. In December 2016, there are 900.511 teachers in Turkey and that number of INSETs seems enough in quantity. However, according to research results, quality of trainings is not sufficient.

According to responses of the participants, two most important strengths of INSETs are learning new methods and techniques and meeting new people. Kanlı and Yağbasan (2002); Balay (2004), King (2002), Sandholtz (2002), Hayes (2000), Bezzina (2006), Yiğit and Altun, (2011), Ergin et al. (2012) reported that INSETs provide new opportunities for teachers to adopt new methods and techniques into their teaching practices. Teachers think that INSETs are necessary to be able to adapt to scientific, technological and social changes, to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for innovation and development in the field of education and to improve themselves in the changing world. Findings of this specific research show that teachers are of the opinion that INSETs contributed to their professional development and helped them to gain new perspectives about education. Moreover, they also state that INSETs helped their personal development. These findings regarding key benefits of INSETs for teachers are in line with some other research findings such as Ozer (2004), Durmuş (2003), Aydınalp (2008), Garuba, (2004), Fung, (2000).

Opinions about the weaknesses about INSETs were higher than the strengths of INSETs, so it could be concluded that the teachers want INSETs' quality to be improved. The main weakness of INSETs was mentioned as poor planning. Because of poor planning, INSETs take place in very busy time of teachers and as a result they are regarded as tiring and boring. Firstly, needs analysis should be conducted cautiously and courses should be planned and delivered accordingly for an effective INSET. However, very few countries assess teachers' needs and this can be because of the lack of research and knowledge about the procedure of needs assessment.

The second weakness of INSETs is trainers' not being experts in their field. Furthermore, they underlined the importance of communication skills of trainers and they reported that trainers should be qualified in human relations. The lack of practical training subjects, not active participation of teachers and the need for objective criteria for choosing the participants were also among the results of the study. Furthermore, the gap between the teachers' own realities and the INSET can be the reason of low impact classroom practices as pointed out in previous studies (Uysal, 2012; Fullan, 2001; Hayes; 2000). Also, in previous studies it was stated that scientific research methods were not used in while assessing the in-service training needs of teachers (Sahin, 1996; Beduk, 1997; Taymaz, 1997).

It can be concluded that INSETs became monotonous and do not meet expectations of teachers. In line with the previous studies, the teachers are not motivated enough to attend in-service training activities and this can be attributed to lack of motivational factors in educational system (Beduk, 1997; Taymaz et al., 1997; Ozer, 2001) and the lack of objective criteria while selecting the teachers for in-service training programs (Sahin, 1996; Ozer, 2001). Teachers indicate that in-service programs do not respond to the teachers' learning needs adequately, and during most of the INSETs programs teachers are very passive. This finding is in line with the findings reported by Akçadağ (2012), Sandholtz (2002).

Concerning with the suggestions for an ideal INSET, appointing the qualified trainers is the most mentioned suggestion among the participants. It was expected the trainers taking part in INSETs should be experts in their field. The instructors' being not competent enough in their field is concluded in previous studies about the effectiveness of INSET courses with teachers at different schools in Turkey (Miser et al., 2006; Ayas et al., 2007). Also the participants suggested that academics from university should teach in INSETs. Teachers state that INSETs should be held in summer months or half term holiday when teachers are not busy. Trainings should be enriched with visual materials to be much more enjoyable, teachers' active participation should be encouraged, technological equipment should be used effectively and efficiently, and cooperation with universities should be encouraged. The result is in line with previous studies (Kavak et al., 2012; Ozer, 2004; Akar, 2007). INSETs' quality could be improved by voluntary participation of teachers, evaluation and inspection of INSETs and rewarding the participants according to responses of the participants. In other studies, it was stated that a workshop after course can motivate the teachers to practise their knowledge and can be a useful feedback on teaching and the changes (Waters & Vilchez, 2000; Waters, 2006).

6. Implications

INSETs are necessary to improve teacher qualifications and maintain their enthusiasm for their job. Also as suggested by Ünsal et al. (2017) as an alternative to MONE, organizations enabling teachers to develop professionally may be held, and necessary supervision could be provided. Ana Maria Forte and Maria Assunção Flores (2014) also stated that it is of vital importance to analyse the relationship between the national system and the school in terms of organisational and professional requirements.

According to findings of this specific study, it is evident that INSET programs organized by MONE should be revisited in terms of content, planning, venue and trainers.

INSET programs can be strengthened by school-based practices to create the schools as professional learning communities, and teachers' professional behaviours (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017). In this context mentoring applications can be beneficial to promote teacher training practices. Especially peer mentoring was reported to enhance professional development, collective learning, shared expertise as well as professional learning communities for teachers (Heikkinen et al., 2012; Langelotz, 2013; Tirri,2014; Kissau & King; 2015). According to the results of the research done by Yirci (2017), it has been determined that teachers attach great importance to colleague assistance for their professional and personal development. It seems that experience sharing and peer-to-peer assistance have greatly contributed to the development of teachers. Because of the fact that particularly novice teachers have often resorted to the opinions of more experienced teachers on professional matters, integrating peer mentoring into INSET programs can facilitate to increase the quality of these programs.

The following precautions might be recommended to stakeholders of INSETs and policy makers:

1) MoNE should be much more careful during planning stage and should take participants' expectations into consideration. INSETs should take place during the summer months when teachers' participation into trainings could be high.

2) Trainers should be selected among the experts and experienced people in their field. Cooperation between MONE and universities should be increased. This will be beneficial both for both academics and teachers since teachers may learn from experts and academics may learn about first-hand information from teachers.

3) Teachers should be more active in training. INSETs could be enriched with technological facilities and visual materials.

4) While choosing participants for INSET, voluntary teachers should be evaluated according to objective criteria.

5) Feedback about the effectiveness of INSETs should be gathered.

6) A reward system could be introduced to encourage voluntary participation.

7) To ensure maximum quality, before INSETs at planning stage, a complete needs-analysis should be conducted (Uysal, 2012; John and Gravani, 2005). Also national wide needs analysis could be done under supervision of MONE. A committee of academicians and teachers can be formed to conduct the needs analysis and the planning stage of such courses.

8) To increase the efficiency of the courses, co-operation between policy-makers, INSET planners, academics and teachers is necessary.

7. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

8. Ethics Committee Approval

The corresponding author confirms that Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University Social Sciences and Humanities Ethics Committee gave approval for the research. The approval document number is 72321963-020.

Endnote: The initial version of this study was presented as an oral presentation at the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER) in Copenhagen, Denmark, 22-25 August, 2017

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