

Problems preschool teachers encounter in the use of out-of-school learning environments*¹

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Abstract

This study evaluates the problems encountered in using out-of-school learning environments in preschool education. The descriptive phenomenological method was used to describe the experiences of preschool teachers. The working group comprises 20 preschool teachers in kindergartens affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in Konya. The participants were selected by the criterion sampling method, one of the purposive sampling types. The researchers used the semi-structured interview method to collect the data. The data were analyzed using the content analysis method. The research results showed that most preschool teachers "sometimes" use out-of-school learning environments and mostly prefer "factories" as out-of-school learning environments. Moreover, all preschool teachers utilize out-of-school learning environments to conduct "science and nature observation." Lastly, the most common problem in using out-of-school learning environments was caused by parents. Based on the results, the parents should be informed about the importance of out-of-school learning environments at the beginning of the semester, and their support should be received.

Keywords:

Preschool education, out-of-school learning environments, preschool teachers, problems.

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² Corresponding author, Ministry of National Education, Turkey, filizdere.962@gmail.com

³ Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Faculty of Education, Department of Primary Education, Turkey, tanercifci@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Learning, a process in which previously acquired knowledge and experiences are associated with new experiences (Laçın-Şimşek, 2020), usually occurs through various activities in educational institutions for specific goals (Güven, 2019). In this context, the planned learning experiences conducted according to the curriculum in educational institutions are called formal learning (Elmas, Aslan & Hakverdi-Can, 2021). In formal learning, which is carried out in a controlled way, the aims to be achieved are predetermined (Laçın-Şimşek, 2020). Furthermore, both formal and non-formal education environments are used in formal learning (Tösten, 2020).

Learning occurs not only in educational institutions but also with activities outside educational institutions. This process is referred to as informal learning. During the informal learning process, which is flexible by its nature, maintained without a specific curriculum, and continues throughout life, students have a chance to meet differences and gain direct experience toward their interests and the achievements of the curriculum (Şen, 2019). In this context, other distinctive features of informal learning are as follows:

- Enable participants to engage physically, emotionally, and cognitively in the learning process.
- Encourage participants to interact directly with natural and re-enacted physical events.
- Realize a versatile and dynamic presentation of science.
- Enhance students' prior knowledge and areas of interest (National Science Board, 2007, as cited in Şen, 2019).

In addition to formal and informal learning, there is the concept of "non-formal learning." According to this, non-formal (common) learning is a learning activity between formal and informal learning and realized in out-of-school environments (institutions), and is usually conducted based on student motivation within the framework of volunteering (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004; Eshach, 2007; Maarschalk, 1986; Şen, 2019; Tamir, 1990). Apart from these definitions and classifications, out-of-school learning is referred to with concepts such as environmental education, education beyond the classroom walls, extracurricular learning, authentic learning, learning outside, learning outside the classroom, and out-of-school experiences (İnce & Akanca, 2021; Koosimile, 2004; Strauss & Terenzini, 2007; Şen, 2019). According to these concepts, everywhere can be considered a learning environment. In this context, many areas such as parks, forests, marketplaces, museums, monuments, archeological sites, and martyrdoms are used as out-of-school learning environments (Çalışkan & Yıldırım, 2021). Out-of-school learning environments (OSLE) are as follows, according to the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) (2019):

- a) All museums affiliated with state institutions and officially registered private museums,
- b) Science and art centers affiliated with state institutions,
- c) Historical and cultural sites designated by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism,
- d) Libraries affiliated with state institutions and literary museum libraries,
- e) Nature reserves and archaeological sites,
- f) Technoparks,
- g) Industrial enterprises that can be visited,
- h) Universities,
- i) National and thematic parks and gardens.

Recently, the aforementioned out-of-school learning environments have become more prominent in education. In parallel with this, "museum education" and "out-of-school learning environments" courses are among the elective courses in the teaching degree programs, which were renewed in 2018 (Şen, 2019). Moreover, TÜBİTAK (Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey), within the scope of Science and Society Projects, organizes nature education to create environmental awareness. The

Science and Society Projects aim to transmit the knowledge to society through interactive activities by visualizing it, to help the participants realize simple scientific facts, and to increase their desires for curiosity, research, and learning. Within the framework of the Science and Society Projects, the first nature education began to be implemented in 1999 with the "Scientific Environmental Education in National Parks" project. Calls with the codes 4001 (Nature Education) and 4002 (Science Camps/Schools) were combined in 2011 and named 4004 "Nature Education and Science Schools". The science and society projects are open to all social groups and target preschool children, primary, secondary, and high school students, undergraduate and postgraduate students, graduates, teachers, and science center staff (Keleş, 2020). Additionally, recently, the approaches within the body of TÜBİTAK, the higher education teacher training programs, and the Ministry of National Education indicate that the out-of-school learning environments must be reconsidered for educational purposes (Şen, 2019).

Out-of-school learning environments' contributions to teaching

Today's education systems raise individuals with various skills such as research, independent living, self-sufficiency, critical thinking, and problem-solving. In addition to schools, experiences in out-of-school learning environments contribute to developing these skills (Bozdoğan, 2016). Out-of-school learning activities help children make relationships between real life and support learning through experience. In this way, theoretical subjects can be taught through experiences (Metin-Goksu & Somen, 2018). Moreover, since the activities performed in out-of-school learning environments engage many sense organs, permanent learning can be realized (Karadoğan, 2016).

Learning experiences in out-of-school learning environments that enable children's active participation in activities (Metin-Goksu & Somen, 2018) support their cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development (Kir, Kalfaoğlu & Aksu, 2021; Karadoğan, 2016). Simultaneously, these environments increase children's motivation toward science by making them realize the science and society relationship, which they cannot learn in a classroom environment (Dönel-Akgül & Arabacı, 2020; Itzek-Greulich, Flunger, Vollmer, Nagengast, Rehm & Trautwein, 2017).

Challenges in the use of out-of-school learning environments

There are some difficulties and disadvantages encountered in using out-of-school learning environments besides its various advantages. Firstly, classroom management becomes more complex in out-of-school environments, and the teacher has more responsibilities. Moreover, teachers do not want to strive with official works because they are obligatory and time-consuming and are concerned about not fulfilling the curriculum. Additionally, teachers must cope with staffing, transportation, accommodation, and food and beverage costs. The other essential disadvantages and challenges are that the preparation process for out-of-school activities requires a long time and effort, there is not enough material in the environment where the trip will occur, and the teachers or guides do not have sufficient knowledge and experience about out-of-school learning (Çalışkan & Yıldırım, 2021; Şen, 2019). Additionally, the presence of dangerous insect and animal species in out-of-school learning environments, insect stings and bites, the possibility of accidents and injuries, air pollution, and the absence of barriers to prevent children from leaving the area worry teachers about taking children to out-of-school learning environments (Saleh, Latip & Rahim, 2018).

Out-of-school learning environments in preschool education

The idea of education in nature dates back to the times of Aristotle and Plato. For years, scholars such as Rousseau, Locke, Froebel, Pestalozzi, Schelling, and Basedow have said that children should be allowed to be in nature (Yıldırım & Özyılmaz-Akamca, 2017). Moreover, some alternative approaches also emphasized the importance of the environment in preschool education. Among these, the Reggio Emilia Approach, which allows children to make discoveries through concrete experiences, described the environment as the "second teacher." (Sadioğlu, Taner-Derman, Bağçeli-Kahraman, Onur-Sezer, Çelik-Korkmaz & Yıldız-Ekin, 2010). Again, one of the five principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach, "the role of the environment" (İnan, 2012), also reflects the importance of the environment in preschool education.

The Waldorf Approach does not teach an academic subject during the preschool period. Instead, children work in the garden, read, plant, and learn by taking walks where they collect natural objects. Preschool classrooms organized according to this approach do not have structured and plastic toys but various pieces of wood, stones, and natural materials. Respect for nature is an essential characteristic of Waldorf Schools, and kindergartens have a nature table where the natural world is brought into the classroom (Sak, 2022).

For the diversification of children's learning opportunities, learning environments and schoolyards are used. Additionally, science centers, libraries, art centers, museums, thematic parks, and historical and cultural places are also out-of-school environments that can be used in education (Parpucu, 2020). Demirel (2019) stated that using museums with various games and activities in preschool education affects a child's personality and character development. He also emphasized that with the use of museums in the preschool period, active participation of children through experiencing, discovering, speaking, answering questions, and playing games are ensured. At the same time, children's creativity and aesthetic-value perceptions are developed (Demirel, 2019). These contributions of museums can be made in all out-of-school learning environments that can be used for education.

Out-of-school learning environments have been becoming increasingly important in the world as well as in the Turkish education system. This situation is reflected in the goals of the 2023 Education Vision (Şen, 2019). The following goals are included in the title of "Innovative practices will be provided" at the primary education level:

1. Children will be allowed to discover the production, culture, art, and geographical possibilities of their region, and to learn about plant and animal species, local dishes, games, and folklore as integrated or out-of-school activities.
2. Schools' cooperation science centers, museums, art centers, techno parks, and universities in their regions shall be strengthened.
3. The use of the boarding school facilities will enable children to participate in regional exchange programs during the summer months.
4. In the regions where the children are enrolled in school, sports clubs in the neighborhood will be established. The necessary structure shall be created for children who are talented in their respective sports to participate in intensive training in sports clubs after school.
5. The current practice of homework shall be restructured in terms of its contribution to learning.
6. Pupils' motivation to find solutions to social problems shall be supported by introducing the introduction of social entrepreneurship.
7. Schoolyards shall be redesigned and transformed into living spaces in conjunction with "design-skill workshops." (MoNE, 2018, p. 88-89).

The 2013 Preschool Education Curriculum supports children's multi-faceted development, develops their cognitive, language, social-emotional, and motor developments with rich learning experiences, gain self-care skills, and prepares them for primary school. For this purpose, the curriculum includes the acquisition of general skills that children in primary education aim to achieve. Also, it is a child-centered and developmental program that supports learning by discovering and developing creativity, according to the basic principles on which preschool education is based (Aşkar, 2021; MoNE, 2013).

In the relevant curriculum, it is stated that environmental the opportunities of the environment are deemed important and that children can show their skills in comfortable environments with free experiences, therefore, learning centers should be organized outdoors as well (Aşkar, 2021; MoNE, 2013). Outdoor activities and field trips are recommended in the "Types of Activities and Explanations," "Play Activity," and "Play Time" sections of the 2013 Preschool Curriculum (MoNE, 2013).

Literature Review

Numerous studies in the literature deal with the use of out-of-school learning environments in preschool education. These studies, which address the problems, obstacles, challenges, and disadvantages encountered in the use of out-of-school learning environments in preschool education, which is the focus of this study, can be divided into two international and national studies. In the international studies on the use of out-of-school learning environments, these issues were recorded: adverse weather conditions (Ernst, 2014; Jidovtseff, Kohnen, Belboom, Dispa & Vidal, 2021; Saleh et al., 2018;), time constraints (Ernst, 2014), accidents and injuries, insect bites and stings (Saleh, Latip & Rahim, 2018), lack of equipment, lack of knowledge and training of the teacher about out-of-school education (Jidovtseff et al., 2021), and safety concerns (Ernst, 2014; Saleh et al., 2018).

The studies that have examined the challenges of using out-of-school learning environments in preschool education in Turkey have noted the disadvantages and challenges such as unfavorable weather conditions (Ata-Doğan & Boz, 2019; Çetken & Sevimli-Çelik, 2018), the inadequacy of physical conditions (Alat et al., 2012), safety concerns, health risks (Alat, Akgümüş & Cavali, 2012; Arnas & Saribaş, 2020), negative perspectives of parents (Alat et al., 2012; Ata-Doğan & Boz, 2019), lack of materials (Mart, Alisinanoglu & Kesicioglu, 2015), and limited playgrounds (Çetken & Sevimli-Çelik, 2018).

Among these studies, the most relevant study to the current research was the study by Uludağ (2021). Uludağ (2021) examined the opinions of preschool teachers and discussed the problems and disadvantages of out-of-school learning environments. The research results showed that out-of-school learning environments have some disadvantages for children regarding safety, social-emotional, developmental and environmental, and for teachers in terms of processual and social-emotional aspects. Therefore, this study was designed considering the studies in the literature and evaluates the problems encountered in using out-of-school learning environments in preschool education. In this respect, answers to the following research questions are sought:

1. What is the frequency of preschool teachers' use of out-of-school learning environments?
2. Which out-of-school learning environments do preschool teachers use?
3. For what purposes do preschool teachers use out-of-school learning environments?
4. What kind of problems do preschool teachers encounter in out-of-school learning environments?

It is expected that the results of the above research questions will provide different perspectives on the use of out-of-school learning environments in preschool education.

METHOD

Research Design

Among the phenomenology types, the descriptive phenomenological method was used in this study. The primary purpose of descriptive phenomenology is to describe individuals' lived experiences and perceptions (Ersoy, 2019). First, the experiences of preschool teachers were identified and described considering these characteristics. Then, they were made understandable for the reader in the research.

Participants

The study group consists of 20 preschool teachers working in private kindergartens affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in two central districts of Konya province. Participants were selected by the criterion sampling method, one of the purposive sampling types. In criterion sampling, all cases that meet the predetermined criteria are studied (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Under the criterion sampling method, teachers working in various schools and having different seniority were reached to increase the diversity of the participants' experiences. Moreover, teachers' written/verbal consent was obtained, and nicknames such as (P1, P2, P3) were used instead of their real names.

Data Collection Tool

The researchers used the semi-structured interview method to collect the data in the research. In semi-structured interviews, the researchers focus on specific themes in a style that is closely related to a conversation. People's motivations, attitudes, beliefs behind their choices and behavior, and the effects of certain policies or events in their lives are examined in these sessions (Raworth, Sweetman, Narayan, Rowlands & Hopkins, 2012). In this context, the researchers prepared semi-structured interview questions and received the opinions of two field experts. In line with the experts' suggestions, some expressions, concepts, and sections were changed or removed from the interview form.

Data Collection Process

The research data were collected in face-to-face interviews with preschool teachers serving in kindergartens in the Meram and Selçuklu districts of Konya. After the preschool teachers gave their consent, the interviews, which lasted between 20 and 55 min, were recorded. After the interviews were completed, all recordings were transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

To evaluate the data, the content analysis method was used. During the content analysis, notes were taken after all the interview transcripts were read. Content analysis is used to obtain concepts and themes explaining the collected data (Kuzu, 2013). It also requires a detailed analysis and identifies and interprets new concepts and categories (Akbulut, 2018). As part of the content analysis, notes were taken by reading the interview transcripts and identifying potential quotes that could be used. Subsequently, categories and themes were reached from the data coded in line with the research questions. In the final stage, the analyzed data were interpreted, and direct quotations were used.

Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

To ensure the reliability and validity of the data analysis, the opinions of two field experts were received. The experts suggested summarizing some sections, removing irrelevant quotations used in some topics, and adding new quotations supporting some sections. In line with the criticisms of the experts, some adjustments were made to the findings. The approval of the Ethics Committee for Social Sciences and Humanities Research of Sivas Cumhuriyet University was obtained for the study.

RESULTS

This section of the study presents the results of the interviews with the preschool teachers in the study group.

Preschool teachers' frequency of out-of-school learning environments

The first research question analyzed the use of out-of-school learning environments by preschool teachers. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The frequency of teachers' use of OSLE

Frequency of use	<i>f</i>
Often	4
Sometimes	11
Rarely	5
Total	20

Table 1 show that all teachers use out-of-school learning environments. P17, who said that she "frequently" uses out-of-school learning environments, expressed her thoughts as follows:

We often take our children on weekly school trips outside school so that they can see different things in different environments. I think that's important. I think that's the most lasting way of learning, especially for preschoolers, learning by seeing, experiencing, and discovering.

As can be seen, the teacher mentioned that learning through experience and discovery enables preschool children to acquire knowledge lastingly, and this is achieved by visiting different environments. Similarly, P15, one of the teachers said, "*We use them a lot and they are better for lasting learning. For example, the children never forget them.*", emphasizing the permanence of learning in out-of-school learning environments.

P1, who uses out-of-school learning environments "sometimes," stated:

We must go to certain places because of age, because of preschool. That's why we cannot go to perilous places. We have many places to visit. However, due to the age of the children, we restrict some places in terms of security and go to certain places every year.

In the quote, the teacher also explained why she "sometimes" uses out-of-school learning environments, saying that although there are many places to visit, they cannot go to different places because they do not consider them as safe for preschool age groups and they prefer certain places. Moreover, P4, who "rarely" use out-of-school learning environments, justified this as follows:

We cannot use them much. There are many official procedures. That's why we can't use outdoor activities much. If we think of the schoolyard as an out-of-school, we do several activities in the schoolyard, but in other environments, it is very rare.

As it can be seen, the teacher stated that they mostly use the schoolyard from the out-of-school learning environments and use other environments more limitedly due to so many procedures.

Furthermore, P9 stated that he rarely used out-of-school learning environments and explained the changing conditions with the effects of the pandemic as follows: "*Before the pandemic, we were more comfortable, we could plan better activities, and children were also comfortable without major restrictions. Then, we could plan more trips...*" The teacher mentioned organizing more field trip activities before the COVID-19 pandemic. Another teacher, P6, who "rarely" uses out-of-school learning environments, referred to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and said, "*We use those environments a limited number of times. For example, we use our yard for limited times. Of course, we cannot use a different environment because of the pandemic.*" Similarly, P12 explained that the pandemic had created many obstacles for the trips to reach their goals effectively:

The business sites are mostly pasta, paper, yogurt, and milk factories... We prefer to go to these places, but due to the pandemic in recent years, children are excluded in this section in terms of hygiene. We had some field trips to business sites in previous years and received excellent feedback. This is one of the best ways to learn outside. But in these years, the number of field trips has decreased. So certain places can be visited, but not everywhere.

The findings presented so far show that many conditions affect the use of out-of-school learning environments, and the epidemic has exacerbated these negative effects.

Out-of-school learning environments used by preschool teachers

Under the second research question, the out-of-school learning environments used by preschool teachers were investigated and are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that the participants used 31 different out-of-school learning environments. Examining the Table, it is noticeable that there is no natural environment among the most preferred places and that mainly artificial and indoor spaces are used. In addition, it was also found that flour, bread, pasta,

chocolate, honey, cheese, milk, sugar, recycling, and paper factories are used in terms of diversity in the factories, which are the most preferred environments. For example, P11 conveyed their experience in the pasta factory as follows:

We saw how pasta is made, and the children had a great experience there [in the pasta factory]. How spaghetti kinds of pasta are made, how the bow kinds of pasta are made, how the twisted pasta types are made... After the spaghetti pasta came out of the machine, a friend who worked there hung it around the children's necks, and they liked it so much. The children saw this... Our children's attention span is concise; the information in their minds is very scattered, but we visited the pasta factory for over half an hour; they never got bored. Then, they ate the cooked version of that pasta, so we spent a day at the pasta factory.

Table 2. Out-of-school learning environments

Environments	f
Factories	15
Museums	14
Kozağaç Park	9
Konya Science Center	8
Butterfly Valley	8
Libraries	8
Schoolyards	8
Around the World in 80 Thousand Park	7
Sille Nature School	6
Movie Theaters	6
Parks	5
Theatre	5
The Atatürk House	5
The Independence War Martyrs Monument	4
Ahmet Keleşoğlu Cultural Center	2
Mall	2
Forest	2
Fire Station	1
Universities	1
Sille Barrage	1
Police Station	1
Post Office	1
Railway Station	1
Flowershop	1
Meteorology center	1
Candle House	1
Workshops	1
Zoos	1
Concert Areas	1
Dutlukır Park	1
Meram Vineyards	1

As seen in the quotation, the teacher emphasized the fact that the children who spent a day at the pasta factory carefully followed all the processes without getting bored. Another teacher, P14, who took a trip to the factory, described his experience as follows:

There was a chocolate factory in the organized industry. They didn't show us the production stage of the chocolate, but they showed us around the sales stand. They offered us chocolate there. We had a conversation, and we came back.

Similarly, P19, who visited various factories in the previous years, said *"We have visited the factories in the previous years. A milk factory, a cheese factory, a pasta factory... A 6-year-old boy saw what I hadn't seen until I was 30. So, this is indeed a big improvement for them."* From all these quotes, the appropriateness of using the factories as an out-of-school learning environment emerges for providing the children with first-hand concrete experiences and is more effective and exciting for the child. P7 explained the places they prefer as an out-of-school learning environment, except for the factories in detail:

We went to Atatürk House. We went to the Çanakkale Martyrs' Cemetery, that miniature place. We went to the Sille Nature School. We went to playgrounds in shopping malls. We went to the post office. We went to nearby shopping malls. We took the children to the train station to buy tickets.

Another teacher P6 stated the various places they went to as follows:

There is a park called 'Around the World in 80 Thousand' in our city. That's where we go. We go to libraries, activities related to books, in the children's library in our city. There are also mind games and such activities. We go to museums for history. In other words, it depends on the places in our province.

P6, who said that he prefers parks, libraries, and museums as out-of-school places of learning, emphasized that the places he goes to are within the province. Furthermore, P18, who like P6 uses the library as an out-of-school learning environment, summarized what they do there as follows:

For example, I was going to the library as an out-of-school activity. We could not go due to this pandemic, but before the pandemic, there was such a section of the library to instill children with the love of books. The section is mainly reserved for the younger children. There were many materials, from play rugs to other things that appeal to children, especially to 3-5-year-olds. For example, visual stories, audio tales... It was like an audio library. It was challenging for me to take out the children from there; they had a lot of fun. We used to do drama, to do puppet shows there.

As it is seen, the teacher explained that there were several materials for children in the library they went to before the COVID-19 pandemic and that the children enjoyed being there. Based on all these quotations, it can be said that many areas appropriate for children, whether natural or artificial, in the city or outside the city, can be chosen as an out-of-school learning environment.

Purposes of the use of out-of-school learning environments

The third research question examined the preschool teachers' purposes for using out-of-school learning environments and is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 indicates that all participants used out-of-school learning environments for "science and nature observation." Science and nature observation includes the activities such as being intertwined with science and technology, doing STEM activities, discovering animals, living things, and plants, researching, examining, seeing, and observing natural and other areas. P1, who used out-of-school learning environments for science and nature observation, stated *"We go to museums; we go to parks for sightseeing, observation, science and nature activities. We also have educational projects and we have STEM projects. For these projects, we tend to take the students to picnic areas more."* The teacher listed the purpose of museums, parks, and picnic areas as observation, educational projects, and STEM projects.

Teachers who stated that they used out-of-school learning environments to "commemorate and celebrate certain days and weeks" had organized trips to out-of-school settings for specific days and

weeks such as Veteran Day, Fire Service Week, World Animal Day, 10th of November Atatürk Week, Library Week, and Museum Week. For example, a participant, P10, mentioned his experiences at Atatürk Museum on the 10th of November, Atatürk Week: *"We go to Atatürk Museum during Atatürk Week to get to know Atatürk closely... Seeing Atatürk's belongings closely, such as his clothes, helps the children adopt that subject better."* The teacher emphasized that when they went to the Atatürk Museum, the children learned about Atatürk better by seeing his objects there.

Table 3. Purposes of the use of OSLE

Purpose	f
Science and observation of nature	20
Commemorating and celebrating specific days and weeks	10
Learning about the seasons	9
Collecting natural materials	5
Gaining concrete first-hand experience	5
Introduction to social life and rules	4
Learning about and exploring the historical structure (past)	4
Getting to know different environments and building	3
Participating in social activities	2
Playing a game	2
Growing plants	2
Developing a bibliophily (love of books)	2
Getting to know Atatürk	2
Performing activities that cannot be done in class	2
Learning concepts (shapes, numbers)	2
Get fresh air	1
Developing manual skills	1
Learn about economic life	1
Conduct an art activity	1
Getting to know the library environment	1
Developing environmental awareness	1
Listening to different sounds	1
Seeing fictional characters	1

Although the participants stated that they used out-of-school learning environments to "learn the seasons," they limited this to autumn only. P17, a teacher, described her activities on the seasons: *"For example, last week we took the children to Kozağaç Park to see and learn about autumn, to see and learn about the leaves and trees there."* The findings so far have shown that teachers use out-of-school learning environments for very different purposes.

Problems in the use of out-of-school learning environments

The fourth research question examined and categorized the problems encountered in the use of out-of-school learning environments, and listed them in Table 4.

Problems with children

An examination of Table 4 reveals that the most common problem children have in using out-of-school learning environments are 'difficulty in control'. This is followed by "inability to self-care" and "child leaving the group". P2 talked about many problems regarding children, which are given in Table 4, and stated: *"Sometimes, children have difficulty following me. They can get lost or mingle with other classes. There are some things they interact with a little too much. I'm having a little trouble with their concentration. They get distracted quickly."* In the quotation, the teacher mentioned that some children

have difficulty following her, leave the group, and get distracted due to the materials in the environment. Another teacher P9 summarized the problems she faced as follows:

Some children can leave the group while thinking about different things and discovering more. This is a big danger to me. For example, if they put something in their mouth because of the child's urge to discover or curiosity, that is of course a problem for me. That brings great responsibility.

Table 4. Encountered problems

Children	Parents	Permissions and Official Affairs	OSLE	Others
Controlling difficulty (10)	Concerns about the risks of the trip (12)	Not accepting the preschool group (5)	Not appropriate for the child's level (7)	Problems with transportation (6)
Inability to self-care (2)	Not allowed to join a trip (4)	Difficulty getting an appointment (2)	Being crowded (2)	Lack of assistant staff (4)
Leaving the group (2)	Forgetting about the permission petitions (2)	Long official procedures (2)	Staff's failure to be able to reach down their level to the children's. (2)	Unfavorable weather conditions (3)
Short attention span (1)	Willing to get on the school bus (1)	Giving a late appointment (1)	The staff's intolerant behaviors (2)	Not enough material (1)
Difficulty following teacher (1)			Unhygienic businesses (1)	Lack of green areas (1)
Too many children (1)			Needs to be paid (1)	Safety risks (1)
Putting extraneous matter into the mouth (1)			Lack of guides (1)	Wrong learnings (1)

As seen in the quotation, the teacher said that the child's leaving the group and trying some of the items in out-of-school learning environments created a problem for her. However, P9 said the following about the development of self-care skills mentioned in the contributions: *"It is difficult for children to do self-care."* Focusing on the potential risks in the field trip, P13 said: *"Challenges are usually due to our age level. You know, a child's running fast and falling can be dangerous, s/he can get injured or lost, which we fear the most because we can overlook it. City environment, crowd, traffic..."* As it is seen, the teacher stated that parents' concerns and the risks of field trips are among the crucial problems that teachers also fear.

Problems with the parents

The most common problem seen during the use of out-of-school learning environments related to parents, which is one of the significant parts of the education process, is "concerns about the risks of trips." In addition, the participants stated that their parents were concerned about their children's getting sick, falling, not eating enough, and getting their clothes dirty. Regarding the concerns of the parents, P8 stated the following:

A parent says, 'It is cold; do not take my child out when it's cold.' However, it is possible to visit the zoo when it is cold. We sometimes say; Let us have lunch in the schoolyard when it is raining, or let us go out and study nature when it is raining. It is very difficult to break the parents' taboos. They say, 'It's cold; they can catch a cold, they can get hungry...' It was not easy. It is hard for us to break the protective instincts of our parents. After that, it is easy.

The biggest problem in the Table is seen as "concerns about the risks of trips." Parents adhered to the protective reflex, although teachers addressed their concerns. Another teacher, P9, said, *"The child*

sometimes falls and gets up. Cases such as falling or getting up can cause anxiety in parents." In the statement, P9 mentioned the parents' concern that their children might come to harm. Besides these, some participants stated that their students' parents were nervous during the first trips but were more comfortable on the following trips. To this, P12 made the following statement: *"Parents have a fuss about how their children get on the bus, how their children get off the bus, who will take care of them in the environment, whether s/he disappears, whether their teacher can keep an eye on them, after the first ride, they are over all these things."*

Teachers who wanted to share the responsibility of the field trip with the parents stated that they encountered parents who forgot the permission petitions, did not care about the trip, and did not send their children on the trip. In this respect, P2 stated *"We generally have the problem of forgetting the petitions, or we receive calls saying 'Teacher, I gave permission, but I did not send the petition.' And we can send those petitions back again."* As can be seen, the teacher emphasizes that they are susceptible to permission. However, 6 teachers stated that they did not experience any problems with their parents despite these problems.

Problems with permission and official matters

When the problems regarding permission and official matters during the use of out-of-school learning environments are examined, it is seen that most participants did not experience any problems. However, 5 participants stated that they had some problems, such as some places "did not accept the preschool group," "difficulty getting an appointment," "long official procedures," and "giving appointments late." P11 complained that factories and companies did not accept the preschool groups and said, *"We cannot go to huge businesses. In other words, we go to simple places, such as the theater, museum, or trips... Right now, we cannot go at all. We went 4-5 years ago, but we haven't been to such places for the last five years, we cannot go, they do not accept. Companies do not accept children."* P2, another teacher, talked about the following problems related to permission and official affairs: *"If it is applied now, for example, an appointment for KOP (Konya Plain Project) Children's Library is only given 3-4 months later, or we cannot go to Sille Tabiat [Nature] School all the time because they do not accept preschoolers most of the time."* As seen here, the teacher mentioned that the KOP Children's Library and Sille Nature School give an appointment for a later date and that they do not always accept the preschool group. These problems may be related to the capacity of the related environments and how much demand is received from others.

Problems with the environments

According to preschool teachers, the most serious problem with out-of-school learning environments is that they are "inappropriate for the child's level." P13, who thinks some environments are not appropriate for children's level, explained his experience: *"Sometimes there are places not appropriate for our children, but we avoid going to those places. We try to go to places appropriate for our children's age level; we take special care of them."* The same teacher gave the following example of an environment that is inappropriate for the level of children: *"I had mentioned Mevlana Museum. The child must also taste that spiritual feeling, but s/he cannot comprehend it right now. The student needs to grow up a little bit more."* Therefore, the teacher did not take the children to the Mevlana Museum, which he thought was inappropriate for their age. Besides, P15, who gave an example of his wrong choice about a natural environment, talked about this subject: *"We went to another place on a nature trip. It was such a bumpy place, but I had difficulty controlling the classroom. I realized that I should have preferred flatter, wooded areas."* As it is seen, the area that the teacher describes also contains serious security risks. However, some teachers emphasized that the excessive movement of children in nursing homes disturbs the elderly and that crowded places cause chaos. P14, who were disturbed by the intolerant attitudes of the officials in some environments, stated the following:

A museum staff on the Atatürk House tour was persistently saying to children 'Don't touch this, don't touch that.' Our children, who learn by feeling, will inevitably touch because they are curious. They already know they shouldn't do any harm; we are with them. Despite that, the museum worker's behavior was impolite. Child galoshes came off, and he shouted, telling him to put on his galoshes. Of course, they are annoying.

The teacher said that constantly being exposed to the warnings of museum workers was annoying in the environment they went.

Other problems

Among the other problems in the last row of Table 4, "problems with transportation," and "lack of assistant staff" came to the fore. Problems with transportation are mostly related to the high price of school bus fees and the limited duration of the trip. P14 explained the problems they experienced with the school service as follows: *"The first is the school bus service. Unfortunately, school bus service hours may not suit us from time to time. Therefore, sometimes we must come back from where we go very quickly, without getting full efficiency. The second is the fee. Unfortunately, school bus service fees are also very expensive."*

The second significant problem was the "lack of assistant staff." On this subject, P1 stated: *"For example, if we will go shopping, I want to take them to a supermarket, but we don't prefer such crowded environments because of their age or because we don't have an assistant or intern."* The teacher said they do not prefer crowded environments due to the lack of assistant staff. Mentioning many significant problems, the teachers did not state any problems related to the school administration or them.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined preschool teachers' use of out-of-school learning environments, the purposes of using preferred learning environments, and the problems encountered in these environments. The first research question results showed that most preschool teachers use out-of-school learning environments "sometimes". In addition, it was found that the numbers of those who use these environments "often" and those who "rarely" are fewer. This situation can be interpreted as teachers not using out-of-school learning environments sufficiently. These results agree with the findings of the study by Çelik (2012). The related study determined that preschool educational institutions did not use open areas effectively. Similarly, Alat et al. (2012) and Jidovtseff et al. (2021) found that teachers have positive thoughts about outdoor activities, but they use these activities in a limited way. At the same time, Öztürk and Özer (2021) underlined that teachers emphasized the importance of outdoor activities in preschool education but were hesitant to take the children out. The teachers, who participated in the study of Jidovtseff et al. (2021), stated that the weather conditions, lack of equipment, and the teacher's lack of knowledge and education were barriers to out-of-school education. These cases indicate that although preschool teachers are willing to use out-of-school learning environments, there are some barriers.

Under the scope of the second research question, it was found that preschool teachers mostly prefer "factories" as an out-of-school learning environment. Teachers stated that they had their students visit recycling, paper, flour, bread, macaroni, cheese, milk, sugar, chocolate, and honey factories in this context. This fact shows that teachers mostly prefer factories for the food industry, that is, appropriate places for teaching economics. The factories were followed by museums, Kozağaç Park, Konya Science Center, Butterfly Valley, libraries, and schoolyards, respectively. On this basis, it can be said that the environments preferred by the teachers are mostly artificial, and the natural environments are used less. This study explains this situation as mentioned some teachers think it is easier to control children and ensure their safety in closed environments, while outdoor environments pose more risks.

Under the third research question, it was found that all preschool teachers participating in the study used out-of-school learning environments to conduct "science and nature observation." This is followed by "commemorating and celebrating specific days and weeks," "learning the seasons," "collecting natural materials," "obtaining first-hand concrete experience," "introducing social life and rules," and "introducing and exploring the historic fabric (past)." These results are similar to the study by Ürey and Kaymakçı (2020). It was concluded in the related study that classroom teachers use out-of-school learning environments in the life studies course to provide their students an opportunity to examine, explore, and question. The mentioned usage purposes reveal that out-of-school learning environments can be used for very various purposes.

Under the fourth research question, it was found that the most common problem in using out-of-school learning environments was caused by "parents." Those arising from parents were followed by problems arising from "children," "environments," "other problems," and "permissions and official affairs," respectively. Nevertheless, an interesting result is considered that all participants stated that they had no problems with the school administration or teachers.

Some studies in the literature have mentioned the problems and disadvantages identified here. In one of these, Karamustafaoğlu, Ayvalı, and Ocak (2018) found that teachers experience problems such as inadequacy of opportunities, restrictive regulations, time constraints, lack of resources, lack of knowledge, and trust, and taking a long time to get permission while using out-of-school learning environments. Uludağ (2021) gave some examples of the disadvantages of out-of-school learning environments in his study: children's vulnerability to hazards, the risk of accidents during transport, the dangerousness of some materials to children in their environment, the lack of guides in the environment and the inability of staff to provide explanations according to children's developmental level, parents' concerns, parents' unwillingness to participate in their children's school trips and non-payment of transport costs. Ata-Doğan and Boz (2019) found that the factors that prevent the use of out-of-school learning environments are unfavorable weather conditions, parents' view of their children's outdoor play, safety, outdoor playgrounds, and lack of materials. In the study by Alat et al. (2012), preschool teachers who participated in the research stated that they could not organize outdoor activities due to poor physical conditions, lack of security measures in schoolyards, crowded classrooms, concerns that children would get sick, negative reactions of parents, lack of auxiliary staff, and unfavorable weather conditions. Likewise, Çetken and Sevimli-Çelik (2018) found that children could not find opportunities for playing outside due to adverse weather conditions, limited outdoor playgrounds, and concerns about their health. Öztürk and Özer (2021) stated that adverse weather conditions limit teachers from taking children out. Finally, Ernst (2014) and Saleh et al. (2018) highlighted that during the design and use of out-of-school learning environments, there are concerns such as climate, time constraints, air pollution, safety concerns (such as accidents, injuries, and insect bites), and teachers' approaches, and the creation of safety barriers. The results of this study indicate that the problems with using out-of-school environments are common or similar. Since overcoming these problems will enable preschool teachers to use these environments more, it is possible to say that eliminating potential risks should be focused more. In this respect, first, parents should be informed about the importance of out-of-school learning environments at the beginning of the semester, and their support should be received. Additionally, the out-of-school learning environments to be visited should be seen beforehand. It is essential to prefer off-peak times to efficiently control children and prevent them from mixing with other classes. A good trip plan should be prepared after considering the possible risks, and the trip plan should be flexible to minimize the problems that may arise during the trip and use the opportunities. Children should be given information about the environment they will travel to before the trip. Teachers should receive training on the importance and benefits of out-of-school learning environments. Finally, cooperation between school administrators, teachers, and parents should be ensured.

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Author Biographies

Filiz DERE works as a preschool teacher in the Turkish Ministry of Education. Her research interests are value education, out-of-school learning environments, and children's rights.

Taner ÇİFÇİ works as an associate professor at the Department of Primary Education at Sivas Cumhuriyet University. His research interests are value education, geography education, and social studies education.