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Developing professional identity: Narratives of preservice preschool teachers

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The purpose of this study was to examine the professional identity development of preservice preschool teachers. In this research, currere method, which is an educational autobiography creation technique, was used. A total of 20 Turkish female preservice preschool teachers participated in the study. The data of research was collected via autobiographies written by preservice preschool teachers. The results indicate that preservice preschool teachers were influenced by their families and by their passionate teachers in their past educational life. Also, the future expectations of preservice teachers have an effect on their present educational experiences. In addition, preservice teachers stated that the autobiographical writing process providing them with the opportunity to review their past, present and future expectations. They stated that this opportunity helped them get to know themselves better and structuring their ideas about their personal and professional lives. **Keywords:** teacher education, professional identity, preservice teacher, currere method, qualitative, biographical research approach

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' professional identity appeared as an important research topic. The professional identity is important as it influenced the way teachers teach, their professional development and their attitude toward educational changes (Beijaard et al., 2004; Bullough & Gitlin, 2001). Being a teacher is not a mere matter of teaching without any context; it is an experience when one's past, present, and future are set in dynamic tension (Britzman, 1991). Furthermore, the influence of identity on the professional development of preservice teacher has been argued. The developing professional identities of preservice teacher directly affect their performance in their future professional life (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001). Accordingly, it is inevitable that the quality of education of future generations will also affect this context. Therefore, an understanding of preservice teachers' views of themselves as teachers is vital importance for teacher educators. The purpose of this study is to examine the evolving professional identity of preservice teachers. Preservice teachers rarely have an opportunity to reflect over their professional careers. Reflection within this study may provide preservice teachers an opportunity to examine their educational careers and plan for their futures.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Professional identity defines as how the ones sees her/himself in the professional life and what kind of professional he/she wants to be (Beijaard et al., 2004; Buchanan, 2015). Teachers' professional identity is central of being teacher and it is related to how teachers should be, how they should act, and how they should understand (Day & Kington, 2008; Sachs, 2001). Teachers' professional identity is formed by being influenced by one's thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and values (Zembylas, 2003). The thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and values that emphasize the personal identity are constantly reshaped over time by being influenced by one's social environment (Kroger, 2007). This basic assumption is also relevant to teacher professional identity. Socially structured teachers' professional identity is also relevant for preservice teachers as the context in which professional identity emerges varies from one setting to another.

Like a personal identity, the professional identity consists of one's position within society, one's interactions with others and one's interpretations of his/her experiences (Gee, 2000; Geijsel & Meijers, 2005). Teachers' professional identity formation is a dynamic, complex and ongoing process (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004). Preservice teachers are impressed by many socio-cultural variables such as biographical factors, the knowledge and learning environment provided in teacher education, and experiences in teaching practices (Lamote & Engels, 2010). In addition to these socio-cultural variables, there are

many expectations from preservice teacher, originating from teacher educators, national standards, images about teachers' roles, competences and professional behaviors during preservice teacher education programs (Tickle, 2000). On the other hand, what level preservice teachers accept these expectations depends on their own experiences and personal background. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to personal part of preservice teachers' professional identity.

Teachers' professional identity play a fundamental role in teachers' decision making about their teaching practices, educational philosophy and interaction with students (Beijaard et al., 2004; Kelchtermans, 2009). The studies reflecting the teachers' professional identity have considered the teachers' professional identity as a key component in teachers' effectiveness, motivation, retention and professional development (Beijaard et al., 2004; Day et al., 2006; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Lampert, 2009; Lasky, 2005). The concept of professional identity is important because of the assumption that ones' professional identity affects her/his action (Watson, 2006). In other words, there is a link between teachers' professional identity and teachers' professional action. Thus, recognizing teachers' professional identity is important for understanding of teachers' professional lives.

Preservice teachers' past and present experiences and their teaching and learning experiences have an impact on their future teachers' professional identities (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999; McLean, 1999). In other words, the teaching beliefs of ones develops based on his past and present educational experiences directly affects how ones will improve his teaching practices in the future. Considering the importance of teacher identity, the preservice teacher education programs are considered to be the first and perhaps the most important stage in the development of preservice teachers' professional identity (Putnam & Borko, 1997; Wideen et al., 1998). Therefore, understanding the professional identity development process in preservice teachers is valuable in providing useful information to preservice teacher education design (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Related studies reveal that preservice teachers' previous experiences and motivation have an effect on the development of professional identity (Akyeampong & Stephens, 2002; Andersson & Hellberg, 2009; Malderez et al., 2007; Olsen, 2008; Schepens et al., 2009). Understanding the factors that affect preservice teachers' professional identity development may enable preservice teacher education to be design in a way that contributes to positive professional identity development.

The preservice teacher education experiences and the preservice teachers' personal, social, cognitive and affective characteristics are effective in the formation and development of professional identity (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Celik & Kalkan, 2019). In this regard the preservice teacher education programs should have an effect that will create a positive professional identity and create the changes that occur by revealing this identity. In addition, it will be important to understand preservice teachers in the context of personal, social, cognitive and affective characteristics. Because preservice teachers' past educational experiences, their personal traits, their motivation to being teacher, their thoughts about teaching and their adoption of teacher responsibilities have an important role in the professional identity development. The meanings that preservice teachers will attribute to all these variables are shaped by what they will experience in the past, present and future (Yasar et al., 2009). In other words, the professional identity is not fixed, it is constantly changing.

It is emphasized that teacher professional identity affects the quality of teaching and education (Flores & Day, 2006). Teacher professional identity has an important impact on teacher performance and actions. Therefore, it is a valuable subject to examine the development process of teacher professional identity. The reason why this subject is studied on preservice teachers is that the undergraduate education process is an ideal starting point for the development of teacher professional identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). During the preservice teacher education programs, preservice teachers form their professional identities influenced by different contexts such as formal coursework undertaken at university, at other teacher education institutions and practicum experiences in schools and classrooms and the socio-cultural context surrounding them. Examining the process that builds a preservice teachers professional identity and explaining the factors affecting this process is very important in terms of understanding the evolving professional identities of preservice teachers.

PRESENT STUDY

In Turkey, preservice early childhood teacher education programs prepare teachers to work with children birth through age six (Ministry of National Education [MONE], 2013) and therefore encompass preparation for childcare and education. This period, which covers the first six years of early childhood, is critical for children's development and learning. Teachers' professional identity also has a great influence on the performance and actions of the teacher. For this reason, preschool teachers' professional identities or the professional images preschool teachers have of themselves, plays an important role in the impact of preschool education on the development and learning of children. Although there are many studies examining professional identity, examining this issue while in the preservice teacher education programs, which is the first and the most important stage in the development of preservice teachers' professional identity, will make a significant contribution to the relevant literature. In addition, professional identity is a complex issue that encompasses the entire career development of teachers. For this reason, in this study, the potential process underlying their professional identity development was tried to be understood in detail by using currere method, considering the past and present experiences of preservice teachers and their future expectations.

METHOD

Research Design

This research is a qualitative study, and a biographical research approach was used in the research. In the biographical research approach, it includes an in-depth examination of one's entire life or part of her/his life through unstructured interviews
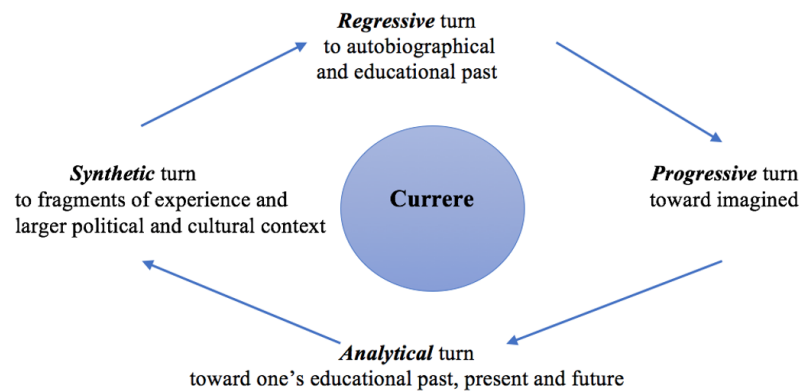
Figure 1. Method of currere (Pinar, 1975, p. 424)

or personal documents (Miller & Brewer, 2003). This research approach basically involves reconstructing the life stories of individuals on biographical narratives and documents. The biographical research approach is an alternative interdisciplinary approach that enables the biography of individuals to be understood within the social structure (Rosenthal, 1993).

In the biographical research approach, instead of focusing on the current situation of the individual, the current situation of the individual is understood by evaluating the one's social context including historical events and life experiences (Miller & Brewer, 2003). Individuals' decisions regarding their educational experiences, their current situations and future expectations are affected by their past life experiences within the one's social context. For this reason, the biographical research approach makes it possible to develop a developmental perspective on the subject by considering the subject in the temporal context (Pinar, 1975).

In this research, currere method, which is an educational autobiography creation technique, was used. Currere method is an autobiographical approach used to examine the life experiences of individuals (Pinar, 1975) (**Figure 1**). This method consists of four main parts such as regressive, progressive, analytical and synthetic. In each part of this method, individuals write their own memories with separate themselves from other people. In the regressive, which is the first step of the method, the individual concentrates on his past educational experiences and reflects his thoughts on how these experiences direct his life, personal attitude and views on education. In the progressive, which is the next step, the individual focuses on thoughts about their future imagines and defines their thoughts. The analytical step includes the individual's holistic analysis of past and present educational experiences and future expectations. In this step individuals describe their biographic present, exclusive of the past and future, but inclusive of responses to them. In the synthetic step, which is the final step of method, individuals evaluate their all experiences in a wider political and cultural context (Pinar, 1975).

Study Group

The study group was determined using criterion sampling, one of the non-random sampling types. The reason for undertaking criterion sampling is to allows in-depth research by selecting information-rich situations depending on the purpose of the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). When the undergraduate program of early childhood education in Turkey, it is seen that the preservice teachers can make observations in early childhood care and education institutions, prepare daily activities and implement them in preschool classroom at the fourth grade levels of undergraduate education. In this context, it was determined as the basic criterion that the participants who will take part in this research should be fourth grade levels of undergraduate education. This criterion has been preferred in order to ensure that students have a longer experience in undergraduate education and teaching profession. Also, it has been tried to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of the subject with this criterion. The study group includes 20 female preservice teachers between the ages of 20-23.

Data Collection Tool

In biographical research approaches, data is usually obtained through semi-structured interviews, video recordings, photographs and various personal documents (Miller & Brewer, 2003; Rosenthal, 1993). In this study, autobiographical writing approach was preferred as data collection tool. The data of the research were obtained through autobiographies written by preservice preschool teachers. In this study, a guide was created to guide preservice teachers to create their autobiographical writings. While creating this guide, the stages of currere method were used. Under the guidance of the autobiographical writing guide, preservice teachers first wrote down their autobiography and educational past in detail. Then, preservice teachers described the future of their dreams. Then they analyzed their writings in their educational past, present and future. Finally, they made a sociological evaluation that considered all their writings.

Data Collection Process

In this study, because of the basic criterion used in determining the sample group of the research, the data of the research were collected in the 8th semester of the 4th year, which is the last education period of the preservice early childhood teacher education program in undergraduate education. Accordingly, preservice teachers who successfully completed the "teaching practice course I" in the 7th semester of the 4th year of preservice early childhood teacher education program were asked to write their educational autobiographies. The number of 20 preservice teachers voluntarily participated in the research. Preservice teachers participating in the research were given a four-week period to compose their educational autobiographies. At the end of this period, 20 autobiographical narratives were reached.
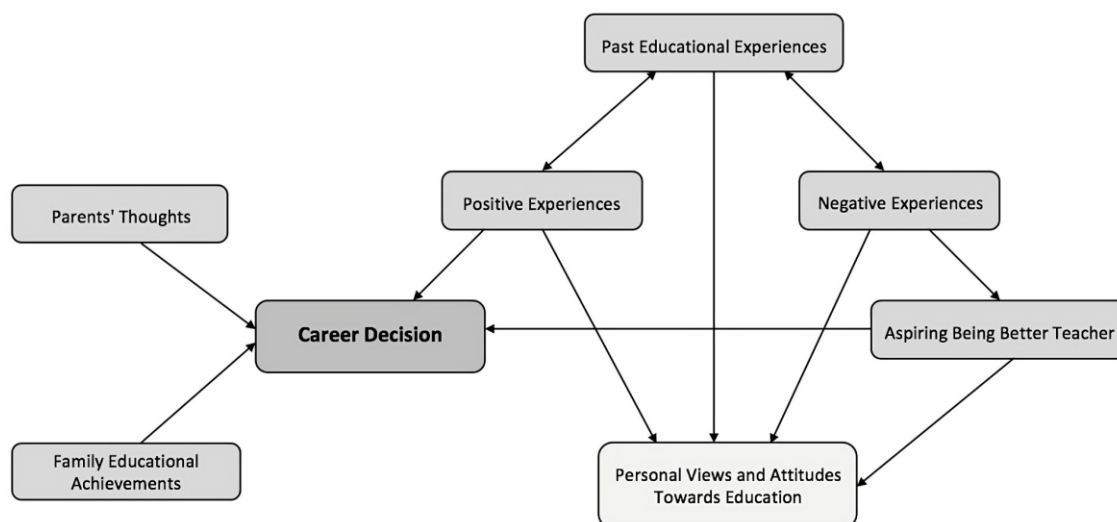
Figure 2. Influence of past experiences on career decision (Source: Author's own elaboration)

The ethical approval of the research was approved by the university ethics committee. Within the scope of the research, the participants were informed that the research was carried out on a voluntary. In addition, preservice teachers were informed that their identifiable information would be kept confidential by assigning pseudonyms (P1, P2, etc.), and their responses to the interview questions and reflective prompts would not interfere in their final evaluation and score.

Data Analysis

In this study, the analysis of the data from currere narratives used content analysis. The texts written by the paticipants were read, coded, analyzed and integrated through a post modern lens as part of the hermeneutic analysis. Hermeneutic technique includes the continuously review and reinterpretation of the obtained data (Ricoeur, 2009). As a research method, hermeneutic analysis proceeds in the form of discovering and reinterpreting meanings (Friesen et al., 2012). In the research, the narratives of the participants were read continuously and simultaneously, were examined one by one as special cases, and were tried to be understood and explained.

RESULTS

Results are presented under four phases, considering the steps of currere method. The first one shows the past educational experiences of the participants. The second phase includes future imagines and thoughts of the participants. The third phase presents the present examining of the participants, and fourth phase includes synthesis of all the experiences of the participants from a wider perspective.

Past Educational Experiences

Preservice preschool teachers' past educational experiences, parents' thoughts, educational achievements of the family members are effective in their decision of teaching profession. **Figure 2** shows the factors affecting the career decision of preservice preschool teachers.

Preservice preschool teachers' past life experiences are effective in directing their lives. Positive and negative experiences of preservice preschool teachers' in their past education life are not only effective in their choice of teaching profession, but also on their views and personal attitudes towards education.

While preservice teachers chose the teaching profession, they were affected by their interactions with their family members and teachers. According to the preservice teachers' expressions about their past experiences with their families, it was influenced that their parents' thoughts about their educational life motivated them to become teachers. For example, P7 coded preservice teachers' narrative is that:

> "My father was the most influential person in my choice of teaching profession. He said he always dreamed of me as a teacher in future since I was a kid."

As can be understood from this statement, it is seen that parents are influential people in the future decisions of their children. Similarly, the P1 coded preservice teacher stated that:

> "My father is someone who is influential in the family, but he is a sweet person in the world, who cannot refuse the requests of his three daughters, who takes extra pleasure in taking care of us. Most importantly, he kept me at the border all my education life by saying 'You are a girl, you have to study, you have no other choice.'"

It is understood that parental views also affect individuals' attitudes towards education. Also the dreams of the parents about their children are also effective in their career choices.

> "My mother always wanted me to be a teacher and she brought me up in this direction. My mother loves children very much, children love my mother very much. My mother's love for children also affected me, and it was effective in my attention the child development department in high school and later choosing preschool education program at the university" (P14 coded preservice teacher).

However, in some narratives, it was also influenced that preservice teachers to choose the teaching profession due to the suppressive effect of parents' views.

> "My family did not want me to choose journalism during the university preference period, instead they said that it was better to be a preschool teacher. For this reason, unfortunately, I gave priority to early childhood education in my preferences. My dream is gone now. The results of the choice were announced and as everyone expected, I placed in the early childhood education department" (P2 coded preservice teacher).

Apart from these, it was also found that the educational achievements of the family members in the narratives of the preservice teachers had a positive effect on their educational decisions. It is seen that preservice teachers are motivated to make a similar future career planning, depending on the appreciation of the educational success of a family member by the environment.

> "When I was in high school, my younger brother graduate with a first from high school and won faculty of education in Marmara University. Everyone was talking about his success. At that time, I thought that in the future, like my brother, I would win the education faculty and become a teacher, and everyone would talk about me as well" (P2 coded preservice teacher).

While the majority of the past educational experience' narrations are based on positive experiences; only four preservice teachers made statements that included negative teacher behaviors. These four preservice teachers' encountered teachers who discriminated among students, despotic, humiliating, angry and shouting in their past educational life. Because of these negative teacher behaviors, preservice teachers queried how an ideal teacher should be before they choose the teaching profession as a career. In addition, it was seen that these preservice teachers aspire to be better teachers because they were negatively affected by their negative experiences as a learner.

> "My first teacher influenced me the most during my primary school years. My primary school teacher was a quick-tempered person who got angry with us. She/he was even sometimes a turn-beating us. He was nice to the children of families with whom he only attended social events outside of school and gave them high grades. In my childhood, I always thought that if I were a teacher, I would never be like this" (P8 coded preservice teacher).

> "My primary teacher was a despotic, demeaning teacher who only liked smart kids. Today, as a preservice teacher, I occasionally ask myself if I were a teacher, would I be such a teacher, and I would definitely not to be such a teacher" (P1 coded preservice teacher).

> "The only thing I want to say to my teacher who ruined my primary school years is this; you showed me how to be a bad teacher and I learned how not to be a teacher" (P17 coded preservice teacher).

Future Imagines

Preservice preschool teachers' future career plans appear to have an impact on their developing professional identities. **Figure 3** shows the impact of preservice preschool teachers' future images on their developing professional identity.

The priority future career plan of all preservice teachers is to become a teacher. In addition, it has also been influenced that there are few preservice teachers (n=7) who want to continue their professional careers in higher education and become an academician in the future.

> "My first professional goal is to become a teacher and meet my students" (P13 coded preservice teacher).

> "When I think about five years from now, I see that I have achieved my goal as to become teacher" (P19 coded preservice teacher).

> "Later on, I became an academician in order to solve the basic problems of the teaching profession" (P1 coded preservice teacher).

> "My goal is to start working as a lecturer at a university. I want to do important research in my field and write a book" (P10 coded preservice teacher).

More than half of the preservice teachers (n=13) think that the school they will teach will be in a rural area and this school will not have sufficient equipment and facilities.
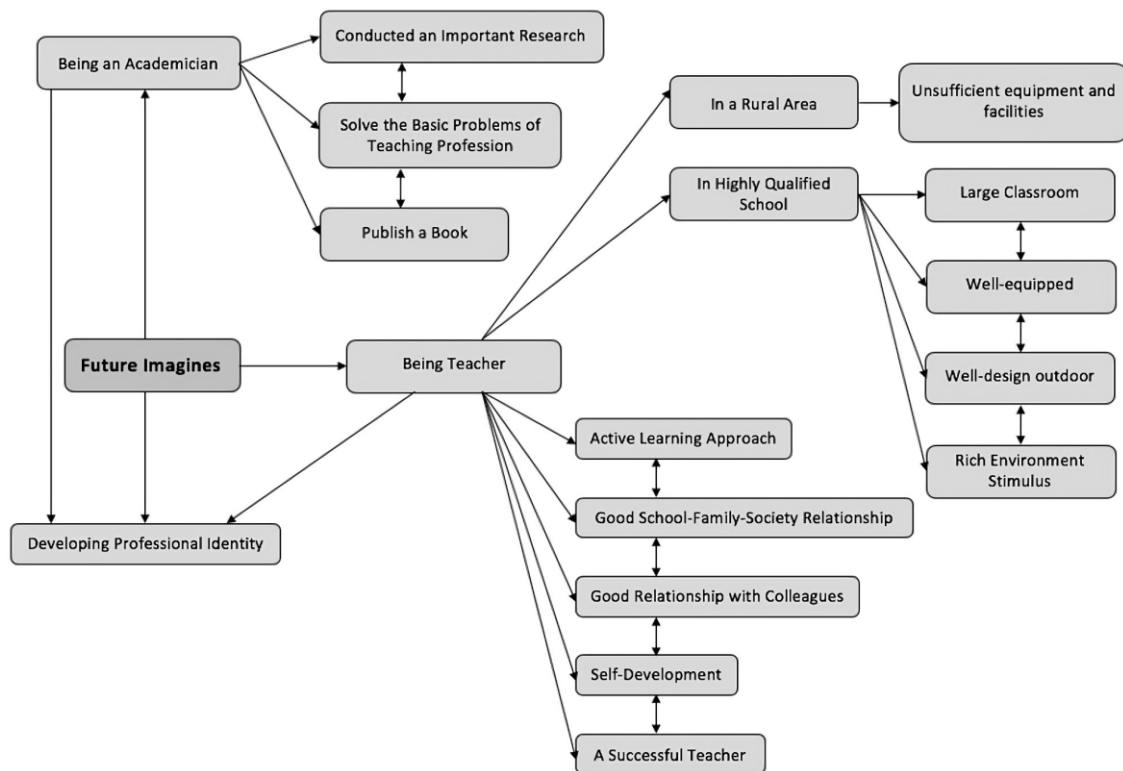
Figure 3. Influence of future imagines on developing professional identity (Source: Author's own elaboration)

> "I am a teacher in a village school. I am waiting for students to arrive at school. The school is neglected. There is a preschool classroom in the school, but the classroom is quite small and there is very little material in the class" (P15 coded preservice teacher).

On the other hand, nearly half of the preservice teachers (n=7) have a future image they will be teachers in schools with adequate equipment and facilities.

> "When I imagine my classroom, where I am a teacher, I see that my classroom is large and the learning environments in this classroom are well-equipped. The classroom is equipped to meet all the needs of children. There is a park outside the school. Some animals are fed in this park. The walls of the school are colorfully painted. There is a playground, where children can play indoors in adverse weather conditions. The school has two floors and there are four preschool classrooms on each floor" (P10 coded preservice teacher).

Apart from these, preservice teachers think that they will be influenced (n=4) and enthusiastic (n=4) in the future. Also, in future imagines, they identify themselves as a teacher who support active learning (n=5), constantly improve self-development (n=6), provide school-family-society relationship (n=9) and cooperate with their colleagues (n=9). In addition, half of the preservice teachers (n=10) described themselves as a successful teacher who achieved their goals. Finally, preservice teachers emphasized the need to develop policies to increase importance given to preschool education (n=6) in their narratives about future imagines.

Analyzing the Present

Preservice preschool teachers' past negative educational experiences and future imaginations impact on their current educational life. **Figure 4** shows the relationship between preservice teachers' future imagine, past negative educational experiences and current educational life.

In analytical step, two major themes were emerged in the preservice teachers' narratives. The first of these is the effect of preservice teachers' future imagines on their current educational life. Preservice teachers think that the decisions they make in their current educational life and their behaviors in line with these decisions are effective in realizing their future imagines.

> "My future imagines have an impact on my current work and efforts. If I want to be a teacher like I dream of, I think that I should spend my days investing for the future and I try to do my best. Even if I struggle sometimes, even if I come close to giving up; I think about my dreams and get up again. I can say that I hope to reap the rewards of today in the future" (P8 coded preservice teacher).

The last theme is the effect of the negative experiences of the preservice teachers in their past education experiences on the stance they display in their current education life. Preservice teachers state that the experiences they have gained from their past negative experiences make them more willing and influenced to be a good teacher. At the same time, they think that their determination will contribute to the realization of their future expectations.
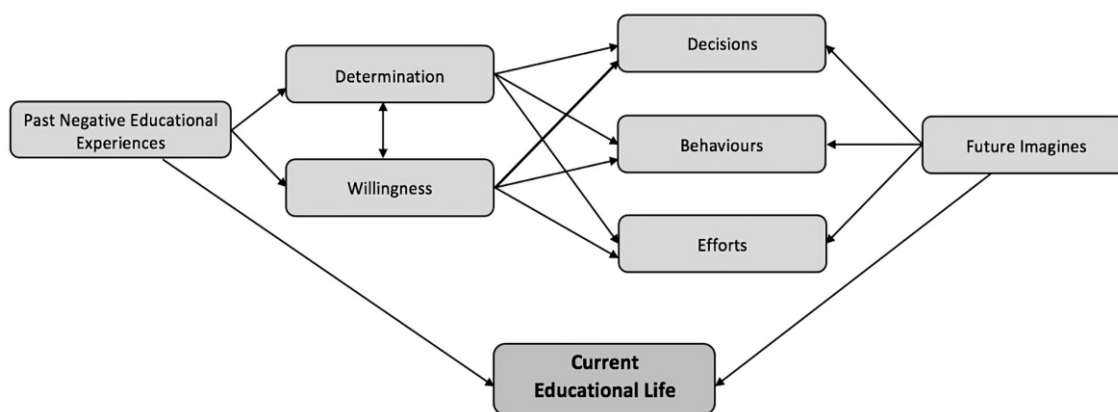
Figure 4. Relationship between preservice teachers' future imagine, past negative educational experiences, & current educational life (Source: Author's own elaboration)
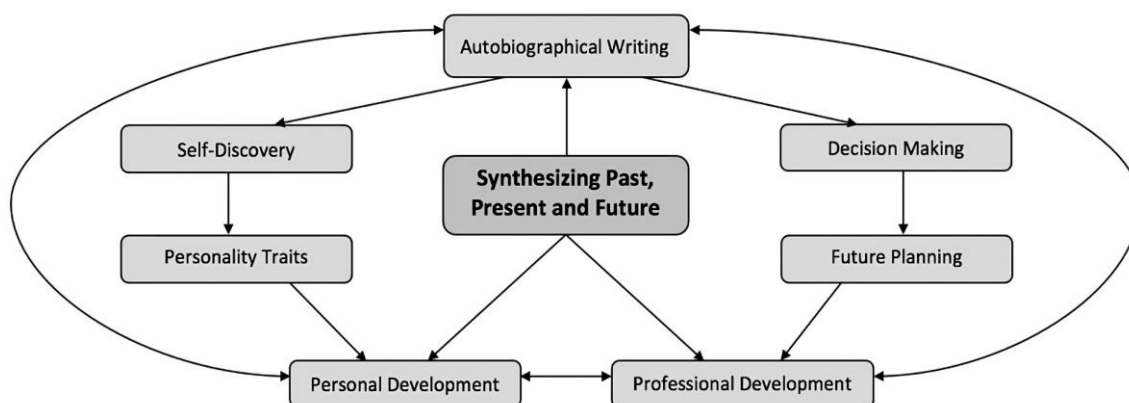
Figure 5. Effect of synthesizing past, present, & future on preservice teachers (Source: Author's own elaboration)

"I am more determined now and more willing to take firm steps for my future. I think that I should strive until I reach my goals without giving up. I think that these thoughts are the thoughts that occur as a result of my past negative experiences affecting me. In addition to this, I need to constantly work and innovate so that I can be the teacher I want when I finish school and in my future life. For this reason, I work regularly and determinedly for my future without neglecting to spare time for myself in my life" (P4 coded preservice teacher).

Synthesizing Past, Present, & Future

The autobiographical writing process contributes to preservice teachers' self-discovery and decision-making regarding their personal and professional development. **Figure 5** shows the effect of synthesizing past, present and future on preservice teachers.

At this stage, preservice teachers evaluated all their experiences in a wider political and cultural context. Preservice teachers stated that they discovered new personality traits in the light of the synthesizing past, present and future. In addition, preservice teachers stated that they discovered how they should follow their professional identity development in this autobiographical writing process. Moreover, this writing process also caused preservice teachers to make decisions for their personal and professional lives. In summary, the process of writing and self-reflection in this way helped the preservice teachers to know themselves, to think about their past and future, and to construct their ideas about their personal and professional life.

"I discovered that I do all my work in a planned and meticulous manner, and therefore I am talented in managing" (P5 coded preservice teacher).

"I discovered how to proceed in the future. I was procrastinating, now I've seen it and I'll start working" (P9 coded preservice teacher).

"At the end of this writing process, I want to constantly update my knowledge and add experiences to advance my career. I decided to take trainings to improve my personality and career. I want to be a teacher who constantly improves myself professionally and personally, researches and evaluates opportunities, and does his job well" (P12 coded preservice teacher).

DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that past educational experiences play an important role in social learning, because these positive or negative experiences cause various emotions to be felt in the person. These feelings and thoughts influence the development of professional identity. The results of the study show that emotions emerge in relation to the context of past educational experiences. This finding is similar to studies showing that both positive and negative past educational experiences affect preservice teachers' development of professional identity (Maldarez et al., 2007; Poulou, 2007; Rodrigues & Mogarro, 2019; Swennen et al., 2004). Preservice teachers begin their teacher education at the university with certain individual judgments about teaching (Furlong, 2013). These individual judgments of preservise teachers are beliefs shaped by the experiences they have gained in their past educational life. Preservice teachers' observations of their teachers in their past education life, their educational biographies are influential on the professional identity development (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991). Preservice teachers approach the new theories they have acquired in the teacher education program by filtering them according to the concepts they have created before (Eick & Reed, 2002). Therefore, investigating past educational experiences is very important in terms of contributing and improving the professional identity development of preservice teachers.

In the research, it is clearly seen that the negative experiences of preservice teachers as well as the positive experiences they have in their past education experiences have a strong effect on them. While positive experiences affected preservice teachers in an expected way in terms of professional identity development, negative experiences also affected positively preservice teachers about being a good teacher. Before starting teacher education, preservice teachers bring a set of beliefs about education that are resistant to change, depending on their past educational experiences (Joram & Gabriele, 1998; Murphy et al., 2004). Adopting a similar perspective, Kennedy (1997) argued that preservice teachers bring with them robust beliefs about what it takes to make a good teacher. In this context, these beliefs, which are caused by the positive or negative experiences they have gained in their past education life, are effective in the professional identity development process of preservice teachers. Preservice teachers' beliefs are shaped during their time as students from past to present, and these beliefs emerge in their classrooms when they start teaching (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). Therefore, it is clear that these beliefs play an important role in the education of preservice teachers.

In the study, it was seen that preservice teachers choose teaching career because of intrinsic reason depending on the encouragement of parents. Moreover, it is seen that preservice teachers choose the teaching profession with the desire to be a teacher like that teacher in the future depending on the positive teacher model in their past education life. On the contrary, some preservice teachers reflected in their narratives that they chose the teaching profession with the desire to be a role model teacher, unlike that teacher in the future, due to the negative teacher model in their past education experiences. Considering these two situations, it is seen that preservice teachers prefer the teaching profession depending on altruistic motives. There are several studies that have examined the motivation of preservice teachers to become teachers. Intrinsic motives, extrinsic motives and altruistic motives are the most expressed motives categories (Bastick, 2000). Considerable research shows that preservice teachers choose teaching careers for intrinsic reasons such as personal fulfilment and development; external reasons such as job security, pay and living conditions; and altruistic reasons, such as making a difference in society and interest in teaching the subject (Bastick, 2000; Richardson & Watt, 2005; Rinke, 2008, Sinclair, 2008). A substantial amount of research consistently reported intrinsic and altruistic reasons (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000) as primary motivations for preservice teachers. In a sense, these findings are not surprising. In the research, what stands out from the stories of the preservice teachers is that a teacher or mentor is important, influencing their decision to become a teacher. This is due to the intensely interpersonal and relational nature of teaching. From this perspective, the vast majority of this sample was persuaded to become teachers by their relationship with a current or past role model. As a result of the research conducted by Olsen (2008), it has been shown that preservice teachers' early play experiences, family influence and prior success in schools are effective experiences for entering the teaching field.

The expectations of preservice teachers regarding their future identity as teachers are varied. In defining identity in relation to self, they described themselves as determined, enthusiastic and constantly improving themselves. While they define a teacher who supports active learning for the identity in relation to the child, they define their identity related to society as a teacher who provides school-family-society relationship and cooperates with colleagues. Sfard and Prusak (2005) point out that an individual's awareness of their identity and the dynamics associated with it can increase an individual's conviction and self-confidence. Knowing that you can shape and protect your identity is an important aspect of personal empowerment (Bracher, 2006). In that context, defining preservice teachers' expectations of their identity contributes to their identity acquisition process (Furlong, 2013).

Finally, preschool teachers believe that such a process of writing and self-reflection is an effective way to learn about oneself, reflect on the past and future, and mature thoughts about personal and professional life. The reflection studies develop individuals' perceptions and understandings of how they deal with their experiences and exposures (Nsibande, 2007). If a person has the opportunity to express and evaluate his own experiences, he can improve his competence in a particular practice (Beltman et al., 2015; Giroux, 1991). A critical analysis of how an individual's past experiences position them will enable him to gain a new understanding that will guide his professional work (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2010; Nsibande, 2007; Stenberg, 2010). Currere method (Pinar, 1975) is seen as an approach that encourages people to explore and learn from their experiences, thus, enables people to become competent in their areas of responsibility.

CONCLUSIONS & LIMITATIONS

The professional identities of preservice teachers are important for teacher educators. In this study, currere approach (Pinar, 1975) was preferred to explore the individual experiences of a group of preservice teachers who started their early childhood education internship. Thus, the identity of preservice teachers was evaluated within the interaction process between the past, present and future. By examining the continuously developing professional identity through preservice teachers, it has become possible to understand the idealized teacher identity of preservice teachers and to help them discover themselves. As a result of the research, it was seen that the professional identity development of preservice teachers was affected by their past education experiences and future expectations.

In this study, the professional identity development of preservice teachers was examined, but there are some limitations considering the nature of the study. First, although the small study group provided us with rich data, it limits the generalizability of the results. Second, when the demographic characteristics of the study group were examined, the structure of the sample group remained homogeneous due to the fact that all of the participants were women and were studying at a provincial university. Therefore, the findings were limited to the reality of the study group studying at a provincial university. However, the findings still contribute to the ever-expanding literature dealing with the professional identity development of preservice teachers. In addition, the fact that the working group consists entirely of women reflects the reality that preschool teaching is a profession predominantly occupied by women.

If this study, which is carried out on preservice teacher, is carried out in a longitudinal research design, deeper information about the professional identity development process will be obtained. In addition, with the longitudinal studies to be carried out, more unique permutations will emerge among the factors affecting professional identity development, thus creating rich opportunities for understanding professional identity development. Based on the research findings, it would be beneficial to conduct more research focusing on family and teacher experiences that have an impact on the idealized identity of preservice teachers. Finally, conducting a similar study in different international contexts will provide comparative international information.

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