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What do Museum Educators think about  
their Roles in the Museum?**

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## **We Are at the Museum: What do Museum Educators think about their Roles in the Museum?**

*By Ceren Güneröz\* & Ayşem Yanar<sup>±</sup>*

*This study explores how technology-supported museum education can promote participatory learning, creativity, and cultural engagement in children. Conducted at the Ankara University Toy Museum, the research focused on how visual, audio, and augmented reality (AR) tools influence children's interaction with museum collections and learning processes. The aim was to investigate how playful exhibition design supported by digital tools can turn museum visits into meaningful educational experiences for young visitors aged 7 to 11. The study employed a qualitative methodology, collecting data through pre- and post-activity forms, observation notes, and content analysis. The results revealed that children showed increased emotional engagement, imagination, and attentiveness when exposed to interactive interpretation tools. AR applications, in particular, allowed children to visualize the historical context and functional use of traditional toys, thereby enhancing their understanding of cultural heritage. Participants also expressed excitement about the sensory and immersive qualities of digital exhibits. In addition to its educational impact, the study examined the challenges faced by museum educators, especially in micro-museum settings. These included limited institutional support, insufficient access to inclusive materials, and time constraints in planning participatory programs. However, educators noted that the use of technology helped overcome some of these barriers and created more inclusive and accessible learning environments. Unlike previous studies that focus mainly on large-scale institutions, this research provides insight into the pedagogical value of small, theme-based museums and their capacity to integrate digital tools meaningfully. The findings suggest that playful, interactive approaches combined with digital content can transform museum education into a more engaging and culturally responsive experience. In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of aligning digital innovation with child-centered pedagogical strategies. It calls for increased support for museum educators and advocates for wider use of inclusive, technology-enhanced learning practices that make museum experiences both educational and socially impactful.*

**Keywords:** *museum education, museum educator, lifelong learning, professional development, sustainability.*

### **Introduction**

There are increasing efforts to improve museum education, particularly in larger cities, through workshops, partnerships with educational institutions, and the

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growth of professional networks. However, disparities exist between public and private museums regarding the employment of specialized educators. Public museums frequently do not have specific museum educators on staff, instead relying on general personnel to lead educational programs, whereas private museums tend to hire professionals with specialized knowledge in pedagogy. The contextual research team conducted in-person interviews with eight museum educators in Ankara, Türkiye. The study covered topics such as professional identity, organizational support, academic growth, and public awareness. The study participant's responses highlighted the importance of establishing professional associations, integrating museum education into curricula, creating sustainable frameworks, and fostering stronger collaboration with government and educational institutions. The workshop of interest applied participatory methods to generate ideas, which resulted in a final statement calling for strategic actions to address key issues in the profession.

### **The Educational Functions of Contemporary Museums**

In 2022, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) published a new definition of museums, which was unanimously approved by all representatives. According to this definition, a museum is a permanent institution that researches, collects, preserves, interprets, and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage, which is aimed to serve the serving society without a profit motive. Museums, with their public, accessible, and inclusive structures, promote diversity and sustainability. They operate ethically and professionally, engage their communities, and provide various experiences that encompass education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing. This new definition not only emphasizes fundamental aspects of a museums such as sustainability, diversity, ethics, and professionalism but also highlights that museum are inherently "educational" environments. In this study, the term "contemporary museums" refers not to newly built facilities, but to museum that have adopted interactive, audience-centered, and participatory approaches aligned with 21st-century learning goals. The elements included in this contemporary museum definition can very easily be observed in new museum architectural designs (Lindsay, 2020). Museums are educational institutions and like educational institutions play a fundamental role, as the first mediators of social inclusion that aims to avoid segregation separation on ethnic, linguistic, religious or and cultural bases (Martini, 2021). Besides Beyond preserving the cultural heritage of societies, museums fulfill essential educational function. The museum experience derived from observing the museum artifacts is an important part of learning. The context of the museum experience can be explained by showing both the richness of its collection and the fulfillment of educational functions through the observations of these museum artefacts. Museum education is a field that improves communication and interaction between the museum community, the society at large people and the environment (Artar et al, 2021). Contemporary museums are dynamic spaces that support learning and discovery processes associated with artefacts or other tangible material objects rather than merely displaying them with engaging intent of their contents. In contrast to traditional education methods, museums offer an interactive

and participatory learning experience (Anderson, 2004; Smith, 2015; Babić, 2016; Knell, 2019). Against previous views, contemporary museum education is not limited to school-aged individuals but aims to create learning opportunities for people from all walks of life of all ages. Contemporary museums enable visitors to gain deeper insights into historical traces and developments in the modern world by presenting its concepts and contents from different perspectives (Janes, 2010; Hooper-Greenhill, 2015; Taylor & Neill, 2008; Tran et al., 2019).

By integrating historical, cultural, social, artistic, and scientific elements, museums contribute to an individuals' understanding of the world in both local and universal contexts. In this sense, museum education is not merely about transmitting information, but also about offering an experiential learning process (Falk & Dierking, 2016). In this way, every visitor is free to derive their own meanings from a museum visit. The exhibition methods used for the display and management of artifacts in museum education facilitate an emotional and intellectual connection between the museum visitors and the museum objects. This connection is a fundamental pillar of the museum's educational function. During museum events, visitors experience both visual and tactile interactions with the exhibition items, which enhances enhancing the contextual learning retention (Hein, 2006).

Another dimension of the educational function of contemporary museums is the encouragement of participation in educational activities. Traditional museum exhibitions were often static, requiring visitors to passively receive information. Contemporary museums, however, develop various interactive methods that enable visitors to engage actively with displayed objects. Digital screens, augmented reality applications, and virtual museum tours provide opportunities for visitors to interact with objects or other visitors from different perspectives (Coghlan, 2018). Consequently, learning processes become more personalized and dynamic. Recent studies also highlight how digital museums function as active learning environments. For example, Li et al. (2024) demonstrate a significant impact of virtual museum use in history education. Similarly, Ergin (2024) emphasizes how digital interactives can enhance accessibility and engagement across diverse visitor profiles. A participatory learning experience transforms museum-provided knowledge into a more meaningful and personal experience (Simon, 2010; Widdop & Cutts, 2012; Knudsen, 2016; Seale, 2021).

An essential aspect of the educational function of museums is their social responsibility. Museums are both shaped by and help shape society. While exploring historical elements in museums, visitors also encounter contemporary social issues. Modern museums serve as forums for discussing and proposing solutions to cultural and societal challenges (Hein, 2005; Scott, 2006; Alcalde et al., 2011; Onur, 2014). Topics such as migration, environmental issues, human rights, women and children, and accessibility for disabled visitors play a crucial role in contemporary museum education (Wickens, 2012; Jennings & Jones-Rizzi, 2017; Ang, 2018; Kadoyama, 2018). Moreover, museums have the potential to strengthen ties between communities. They are designed as suitable environments to bring together people of different ages and cultural backgrounds, allowing both individual and group learning experiences. A recent study by Fissi, Gori, and Romolini (2024) highlights how digital technologies have been employed to improve inclusivity in

museums. Their research, based on Italian museum experiences, shows that virtual museum visits designed for people with disabilities provided an engaging and authentic experience, with participants describing the visits as “completely real.” This finding underscores the potential of digital tools to create inclusive environments that go beyond physical accessibility and foster emotional and cognitive engagement among diverse audiences.

The educational function of museums extends far beyond being mere channels for information dissemination. Museums serve as spaces for learning and discovery, linking past and present traces to help visitors develop a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the world. Education in museums is shaped not only by displayed objects but also by exhibition methods, interactive applications, and social responsibilities. In this context, museums contribute to individuals' learning processes while playing a crucial role in fostering dialogue and understanding among communities. The educational function of museums encompasses a multi-layered and profound process in cultural, social, and intellectual dimensions.

The digital transformation of museums has reshaped the way cultural institutions engage with their audiences, preserve heritage, and facilitate learning. Over the past decade, especially accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, museums have increasingly integrated digital tools such as virtual exhibitions, augmented reality (AR), artificial intelligence (AI), interactive displays, and mobile applications. These technologies not only broaden access for geographically and physically distant audiences but also offer personalized and immersive experiences that traditional exhibitions may not provide (Falk and Dierking, 2016; Lee et al. 2020).

Virtual museums, for instance, allow users to explore collections remotely, often accompanied by multimedia narratives, gamified tasks, and social interaction tools (Liao et al, 2020). Augmented reality applications can superimpose historical information or reconstructed environments onto real artifacts, enriching interpretation and learning. AI chatbots and voice assistants are increasingly employed as digital guides to respond to visitor queries in real-time, improving the accessibility and efficiency of museum services.

Despite these advantages, the digitalization of museums is not without challenges. Turco and Calvano Many institutions, particularly in developing countries, lack the financial resources, technical expertise, or digital infrastructure necessary to implement such technologies effectively. Additionally, ethical concerns around digital reproduction, data privacy, and the authenticity of online experiences remain critical issues. Furthermore, the overreliance on digital platforms risks excluding audiences with limited access to technology or digital literacy (Valverde, 2021).

Nevertheless, digital transformation holds immense potential for making museums more inclusive, interactive, and future-oriented. When aligned with educational and curatorial goals, digital strategies can enhance engagement, diversify participation, and ensure the sustainability of museum practices in the 21st century. As Kenderdine (2021) states rather than replacing physical experiences, digitalization should be seen as a complementary approach that expands the reach and relevance of museums in a rapidly evolving cultural landscape.

## **Museum Education in the Curricula of the Ministry of National Education in Türkiye**

Museum “education” plays a crucial role in realizing this mission by providing opportunities for learning and engagement that cater to diverse audiences. Through carefully designed educational programs and activities, museums can foster inclusivity, helping visitors of all backgrounds connect with cultural heritage in meaningful ways. Education also supports the idea of sustainability by encouraging ongoing engagement with cultural and historical knowledge, ensuring that these institutions remain relevant to future generations. In this way, museum education not only enhances the visitor experience but also strengthens museums as spaces for dialogue, reflection, and shared understanding, making them truly accessible to all and sundry. The concept of museum education has, for the first time, been included in the 2024-28 strategic plan of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which is responsible for museums in Türkiye, in alignment with the updated definition of museums (T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2024).

Cultural heritage management in Türkiye involves the preservation, protection, and promotion of the country's rich cultural heritage, which spans from ancient civilizations to modern times. Türkiye's cultural heritage is diverse, including archaeological sites, historic buildings, intangible cultural practices, and natural landscapes. Türkiye is home to numerous UNESCO World Heritage Sites. As of 2024, Türkiye has 21 heritage sites on the list, 19 of which are cultural and 2 are mixed. This number continues to increase with the annual meetings of the World Heritage Committee (UNESCO World Heritage, 2023). In addition to these heritage sites, there is also a Tentative List, which consists of sites proposed for inclusion but whose nomination processes have not yet been completed. As of 2023, Türkiye's Tentative List includes 72 cultural, 4 mixed, and 3 natural heritage sites, totaling 79 (UNESCO Türkiye National Commission, 2024). Türkiye also ratified the 'Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage' on October 17, 2003. As of 2023, there are thirty (30) elements listed. The protection and preservation of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage in Türkiye is primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism on behalf of the state. The Ministry is tasked with ensuring the sustainable preservation of Türkiye's universal cultural, artistic, and tourism values, promoting and safeguarding them, and facilitating access to information to raise societal awareness. In this context, the Directorate General of Cultural Heritage and Museums and the General Directorate of Living Heritage and Cultural Activities within the Ministry directly collaborate with internal and external stakeholders to protect, enhance, and sustain both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. In Türkiye, museums are affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. As of 2023, the number of museums under the Ministry's supervision is 606. Of these, 212 are state museums, and 430 are private museums (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, 2024). The inclusion of cultural heritage sites and museums in national education programs and their widespread use as informal and out-of-school learning environments are becoming increasingly common. In Türkiye, museum education in the curricula of the Ministry of National Education (MEB) is generally approached with an interdisciplinary perspective. Rather than

being a direct course, museum education is integrated into various subjects at different levels, particularly Life Sciences, History, Social Studies, Visual Arts, Technology, and Design. The Ministry of National Education made significant decisions in the 2000s, implementing changes in education programs and adopting a constructivist learning approach.

This approach redefined classrooms as learning spaces where skills are developed. Since 2005-2006, the use of museums has been emphasized in Visual Arts, Turkish, Mathematics, Social Studies, Life Sciences, and Science courses, making museum education a formal learning domain. During the same period, museum education courses were incorporated into teacher training programs in higher education institutions, allowing prospective teachers to gain theoretical and practical knowledge in this field. In the 2005-2006 curriculum, the integration of museum use in Art Activities courses (grades 1-8) and the structuring of Visual Arts courses to include museums, cultural heritage sites, and art galleries significantly contributed to the development of museum-school collaboration in Türkiye.

In 2024, the National Maarif Model was introduced by the Ministry of National Education under the theme "From Roots to the Future". The Maarif Model is presented as a holistic framework consisting of the fundamental approach of curricula, student profiles, the virtue-value-action framework, and the skills framework. The skills framework includes conceptual skills, domain skills, tendencies, social-emotional learning skills, and literacy skills. The student profile targeted by the model aims to cultivate "competent and virtuous individuals" while fostering moral, courageous, determined, healthy, productive, wise, aesthetic, compassionate, inquisitive, and patriotic students (Efe, 2024). When discussing the fundamental approach of the Maarif Model, Türkiye's civilizational heritage based on values such as justice, wisdom, compassion, kindness, truthfulness, diligence, usefulness, and beauty is particularly emphasized. The model includes both school-based planning and extracurricular activities within a holistic educational approach.

The Maarif Model adopts strategies to develop students' intellectual tendencies, identifying eleven tendencies: specialization, focus, creativity, truth-seeking, open-mindedness, analytical thinking, systematic thinking, questioning, skepticism, critical thinking, and originality. The model specifically details the domain skills for Turkish, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Seventeen skills closely linked to 21st-century competencies were identified under the social sciences domain, on the basis of considerations of considering local and international literature, the unique structure of the discipline, and the contextual contemporary requirements. These include: Perception of time and chronological thinking, evidence-based inquiry and research, historical empathy, Understanding change and continuity, Social Participation, Entrepreneurship, Spatial thinking, Geographical inquiry, Geographical observation and fieldwork, Map skills, Interpretation of tables, graphs, figures, and diagrams, Logical reasoning, Philosophical inquiry, Philosophical reasoning, Philosophical articulation, Critical sociological thinking and Historical issue analysis and decision-making.

The Social Studies curriculum includes substantial content that necessitates the effective use of out-of-school learning environments. The model also aims to support students' development in system literacy, covering areas such as

information literacy, digital literacy, civic literacy, data literacy, financial literacy, visual literacy, and art literacy. The inclusion of visual literacy, cultural literacy, and art literacy in the curriculum necessitates the use of out-of-school learning environments, particularly museums, in the learning process.

Developing an interdisciplinary approach also requires utilizing diverse environments as learning spaces. The curriculum particularly encourages the use of open spaces and out-of-classroom learning environments to develop visual literacy, cultural literacy, and art literacy skills, with museums being at the forefront of these spaces. The program specifies that suitable out-of-classroom learning environments include natural surroundings (open-air activities and nature-based learning environments) as well as artistic, scientific, cultural, and sports venues (museums, scientific institutions, sports training centers, galleries, etc.) (Efe, 2024).

In this context, the Maarif Model assists students in participating in lifelong learning activities tailored to their artistic or sports interests and exploring different career fields and options. To enhance art literacy skills, the curriculum aims to increase students' integrated competencies in understanding art forms and techniques, analyzing art, interpreting art within cultural, historical, and social contexts, and developing artistic skills. Museums, galleries, and similar out-of-school learning environments should be integrated into the program as essential spaces for developing artistic skills.

### **Museum Education in the New Maarif Model Curriculum in Türkiye**

As part of the virtue of patriotism, which is among the program's virtues, priority is given to ensuring that children become familiar with both tangible cultural heritage, such as protected areas, museums, handicrafts, and cuisine, as well as intangible cultural heritage, including lullabies, folk songs, riddles, and epics. The preschool education program is divided into three sections based on age groups: 36-48 months, 48-60 months, and 60-72 months. Various domain skills have been identified, including Turkish Language Skills, Mathematics Skills, Science Skills, Social Skills, Movement and Health Skills, Art Skills, and Music Skills. Classroom activities contribute to children's acquisition of values by emphasizing the adoption of societal values, the development of empathy, and respect for diverse perspectives during their interactions with one another. It is emphasized that children will have opportunities to reinforce the values they acquire through school-based activities, such as special days and weeks, national and religious holidays, projects, and exhibitions. It is also stated that planned activities in out-of-school learning environments, such as museums, science centers, art centers, historical and cultural sites, and libraries, will enable children to integrate the values they have learned into their daily life experiences. To support the development of these skills, it is recommended that preschool education institutions establish various learning centers, including a block center, book center, early literacy center, music center, art center, science center, mathematics center, dramatic play center, and outdoor play center. When necessary, teachers can create temporary learning centers for short-term objectives based on children's interests, activities included in the curriculum,

projects, spontaneous learning opportunities, etc. These temporary centers may focus on professions such as cobbler shoemaker, grocer, greengrocer, chef, tailor, doctor, or police officer, featuring materials frequently used in these professions. Additionally, environments such as a marketplace, supermarket, fire station, hospital, or post office can be utilized as temporary centers.

Taking local characteristics into account, different centers focusing on traditional crafts such as carpet weaving, fishing, and leatherworking can also be created. These centers may include materials that reflect their specific themes, as well as materials prepared collaboratively with children. The program emphasizes that the teacher acts as a guide in out-of-school learning experiences such as outdoor activities, museum visits, or nature walks, directing children and helping them understand and make sense of what they see and experience in their surroundings. The teacher must first determine the objective of the activity to be conducted in an out-of-school learning environment. The purpose of the trip, along with the children's age group and interests, forms the foundation of the excursion plan. It is essential for the teacher to have previously visited the selected learning environment, as this helps ensure the trip achieves its objectives and assists in overcoming potential challenges during the process. Before the trip, activities that capture children's attention, stimulate their curiosity, and support the trip's objectives can be conducted. It is also important to obtain all necessary permissions and approvals from the school administration and families to complete the required official procedures. Additionally, an emergency plan should be prepared. To ensure safety during the trip, children should be provided with prior information, and excursion rules should be established together with them. This will help children follow and adhere to the guidelines more easily.

The purpose of field trips conducted in out-of-school learning environments should not be perceived solely as visiting the location (Keskin & Kaplan, 2012; Saraç, 2017; Gürsoy, 2018). The Maarif Model preschool education program emphasizes that engaging in various activities with children, such as treasure hunts, object-finding games, and role-playing, contributes to achieving the objectives of the trip and enhances the retention of learning. This approach highlights the significance of commonly used methods and techniques in museum education. One such method, the treasure hunt, is an activity designed to encourage participants to locate specific objects or information within the museum. The primary aim of a treasure hunt is to foster a deeper connection between participants and the exhibited artifacts while actively engaging them in the learning process. During the activity, participants are provided with clues related to specific objects, artworks, or historical items within the museum collection. By following these clues, they attempt to locate the designated objects. This process not only promotes teamwork but also enhances individuals' analytical thinking skills (Veldhuizen, 2024). Treasure hunts appeal to a wide age range, from children to adults, and they are particularly effective in making museum visits more engaging and educational for preschool-aged children.

The program emphasizes that out-of-school learning environments such as museums, galleries, etc., are also evaluated in the context of community participation. It is stated that preschool education institutions will collaborate with

various schools, museums, libraries, universities, municipalities, non-governmental organizations, health, and social service institutions to ensure that children, families, and schools receive higher quality services. In this process, children are also expected to participate in community engagement activities. Organizing activities and implementing projects by visiting places such as parks, museums, and libraries in the school's surroundings, as well as making visits to libraries and museums within the scope of special days and weeks, contribute to enhancing community participation (Rogoff et al., 2016). The Preschool Education Curriculum includes examples of art-themed activities such as in-class activities, museum activities, and gallery activities.

In the Primary School Life Sciences Curriculum (Grades 1, 2, 3), the teaching and learning applications section includes activities suitable for both in-school and out-of-school environments to maximize students' academic, social, and emotional skills development. These student-centered activities emphasize the necessity of making students more active and designing learning environments in an engaging and enjoyable manner. In this process, utilizing in-school learning environments (such as classrooms, school libraries, laboratories, skill and design workshops, school gardens, etc.) along with out-of-school learning environments (such as historical sites, monuments, national parks, archaeological excavation areas, exhibitions, libraries, museums, cultural centers, science and art centers, research institutes, public and private institutions, etc.) will help students establish a connection between school and real life.

The curriculum recommends incorporating various teaching methods and techniques, including lecturing, discussion, case studies, demonstration, problem-solving, creative drama, individual work, group work, brainstorming, presentations, question-and-answer, simulation, educational games, oral history, local history, museum visits, and project-based learning. These methods are recognized as some of the most effective techniques for extending learning beyond the classroom walls (Köksal, 2016; Gözütok, 2023).

One of the special days and weeks included in the Life Sciences curriculum is Museum Week, celebrated between May 18-24. Since 1977, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) has designated May 18 as International Museum Day, aiming to promote museum culture and the preservation of world cultural heritage. Many museums celebrate International Museum Day with various activities under different themes (Caerols-Mateo, 2017). International Museum Day was first celebrated 40 years ago, and over time, it has been observed by an increasing number of museums worldwide. For example, in 2024, approximately 37,000 museums from 158 countries and regions participated in the event. ICOM has outlined a roadmap for museums, focusing on themes such as: "Education and Research in Museums" (2024), "Museums, Sustainability, and Well-being" (2023), "The Power of Museums" (2022), "The Future of Museums: Recover and Reimagine" (2021) and "Museums for Equality: Diversity and Inclusion" (2020). Through these themes, museums have reevaluated their functions and societal roles.

In line with this, museums affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Türkiye extend International Museum Day celebrations throughout Museum Week (May 18-24) with various events. Within this framework, the 4th Learning

Area: My Living Place and My Country in the Life Sciences Curriculum of the National Maarif Model includes a focus on historical sites and natural landmarks, emphasizing museum visits as an essential educational component (National Maarif Model Life Sciences Curriculum, 2024). Similarly, in middle school, within the scope of History and Social Sciences courses, and in high school, within the scope of History and Visual Arts courses, there are contents suitable for utilizing museums as out-of-school learning environments.

### **Museum Educators in Contemporary Education**

Museums play a crucial role in fostering lifelong learning by providing dynamic and engaging environments that encourage individuals of all ages to explore and acquire knowledge. The evolution of museum education reflects the tension between traditional curatorial priorities and educational demands, with a growing prioritization of community engagement and audience-centered learning. By the late 20th century, museum education had become formalized, with many institutions establishing dedicated educational staff and departments (Munley & Roberts, 2006; Talboys, 2016). Museum educators play a crucial role in implementing museums' educational agendas (Center for the Future of Museums, 2014). Tran (2008) defined museum educators as paid staff responsible for carrying out the museum's educational agenda, including all programs, activities, and research related to presenting artifacts to visitors (Ruge, 2008). Nolan (2009) notes that their responsibilities often blur customer service priorities, leading museum educators to take on frontline roles rather than being recognized as essential public-interfacing resources. Karadeniz et al. (2015) also highlight that this situation potentially explains the limited research on digital museum education involving educators.

Adopting the ICOM's new museum definition has led to a paradigm shift in museology, influencing Turkish practices. Consequently, private museums are emerging in Türkiye. Although many developed countries feature a diverse range of museums, Türkiye's institutions primarily focus on archaeological and ethnographic exhibitions. Thematic collections from private museums have contributed to diversifying museum missions in Türkiye. Museums now serve the public and meet the needs of researchers and professionals. With a broad range of stakeholders, including museum staff, visitors, scholars, and administrators from both public and private institutions, museums are increasingly viewed as institutions with multiple evolving objectives, including inclusion, communication, and education.

In addition to fostering museum-school collaborations for educational purposes, regulations emphasizing the inclusion of departments such as promotion, marketing, and public relations are crucial for enhancing communication between museums and visitors, which is in line with contemporary museology. Promoting museum activities through modern marketing strategies aims to attract current and potential visitors. Furthermore, national legislation encourages the development of diverse museum activities, such as educational courses, conferences, and tours, to

broaden engagement and enrich museum offerings (Kartoğlu, 2016; Kervankiran, 2014; Kervankiran et al., 2016). This study focused on the evolving roles and responsibilities of museum professionals and explored the impact of contemporary museology on their practices. It aims to investigate the position of “museum educators” in Türkiye.

## Methodology

This study, designed as a case study, is one of the qualitative research methods that examines in-depth museum professionals living in Türkiye and working in the field of museum education including private museums. Study investigates the job descriptions, challenges, uncertainties, and opportunities they face in public and private museums. It aims to explore the evolution of museum education in response to the changing definitions of museums while critically assessing the challenges and opportunities museum educators' encounter. The study was designed within a qualitative research model including in-focus group meeting with 8 people.

## Discussion and Conclusion

**Table 1.** *Participants in focus group meeting*

The museum education professionals	Number of Participants
Participants who have MA degrees in museum education	2
Teachers who have MA degrees in museum education	2
Teachers who do not have MA degrees in museum education	1
Scholars in the field of museum education	2
Museum professionals who work for state museums	1
Total	8

A two-hour focus group discussion attended by eight museum professionals (five women and three men) thoroughly explored the prominent issues highlighted during online and in-person meetings. The questions at the focus of the discussion were (1) primary responsibilities of museum educators and uncertainties in their roles, (2) challenges they faced, and (3) opportunities in the field. At last, participants were asked (4) “if you could make one change to improve your role as a museum educator, what would it be?” for their sincere reflections.

### Challenges that museum educators have and face

Having to take on tasks beyond their duties and responsibilities is a significant issue. Museum educators face challenges in conducting workshop activities due to the lack of sufficient accessibility for individuals with physical, visual, or auditory disabilities who visit the museum for educational purposes. There is no formal

position for museum educators within the museum legislation in Türkiye. There are no professionals specifically designated as museum educators in state museums. Professionals in positions such as archaeologists, art historians, and other related roles working in state museums are also expected to perform the duties of a museum educator. Museum professionals, who already face heavy workloads, are tasked with undertaking the challenging responsibility of education.

*"I am both an archaeologist and a museum educator. I have many responsibilities in the museum. It's a tiring job, and taking on so many roles alone is exhausting." Participant 5.*

In private museums, museum educators are employed in workshops; however, they are also utilized in other positions when needed, which increases their workload. Furthermore, these professionals lack job security.

*"When there is a need for staff support at the museum entrance, you go there to assist, and then return to prepare your own workshop. You are also required to help with setting up temporary exhibitions. There are many roles and a heavy workload." Participant 2.*

*"The museum we work with sometimes lacks the necessary equipment and physical accessibility for visitors with disabilities. In these situations, we have to exert more effort to do our job and compensate for the museum's shortcomings with our services. This not only increases their workload but also can lead to burnout, stress, and a decrease in the quality of the work they are able to focus on." Participant 7*

Guided tour practices in the museum are perceived as museum education by both visitors and museum management, and there is an expectation to provide guidance services to hundreds of children and young people. A museum professional responsible for museum education is required to engage with hundreds of individuals alone throughout the entire day.

*"The classroom sizes are at least 30 students, and they visit multiple museums in a single day. They request that museum education activities be conducted in a short amount of time, which lowers the quality of the experience." Participant 8*

Due to long and intensive working hours, museum educators experience fatigue and are subjected to both psychological and physical strain.

*"I confess that the overwhelming workload decrease my job satisfaction, leading to disengagement or dissatisfaction with the work environment." Participant 2*

The insufficient budget allocated for education due to the challenges faced by private museums in securing funding or sponsorship limits the working area of museum educators.

*"I have great workshop ideas for temporary exhibitions, but due to budget limitations, obtaining materials becomes difficult. As a result, I sometimes have to change the workshop setup." Participant 4*

The organizational structure of the Ministry of Culture, which is responsible for museums, is professional. A museum educator can be provided for each museum, and through this organizational structure, museum education can reach every city in Türkiye.

*"All we need is for the ministry to assign at least one museum educator to each museum. These professionals can organize the school-museum collaboration and establish the system. They would also relieve other museum professionals whose primary duties are not education." Participant 3*

In response to the question, "If you could make one change to improve your role as a museum educator, what would it be?", participants emphasized the need for institutional support and autonomy in program design. A recurring theme was the desire for more inclusive decision-making processes. Participant 6 expressed *"I wish educators were involved earlier in the exhibition planning stages; this would help us align educational programs more effectively."* Several participants also mentioned the lack of structured training and professional development. As Participant 4 noted, *"More workshops on digital tools and pedagogical strategies would strengthen our role and confidence."* Others called for greater recognition of museum educators' contributions, both within the institution and in broader cultural policy.

The findings indicate that the role of museum educators remains underdefined within institutional policies, leading to inconsistencies in employment conditions and professional recognition. Unlike countries where museum education is fully integrated into national education systems, Türkiye's framework lacks standardized qualifications and structured career pathways. Addressing these challenges requires collaboration between governmental agencies, museums, and academic institutions to develop a unified professional framework.

Museum educators require structured professional development programs and formalized career pathways to strengthen their role within institutions. Collaboration between museums and educational institutions should be reinforced through policy changes that recognize museum education as a distinct profession. The integration of digital tools and interactive technologies in museum education can enhance engagement and accessibility, ensuring a more inclusive learning experience. Innovative practices, such as virtual museum tours and augmented reality applications, can bridge the gap between formal education and experiential learning. Ensuring sustainable funding for museum education programs is essential to maintain high-quality educational activities. Public and private sector collaboration can provide necessary resources for developing long-term educational initiatives in museums.

## Conclusion

This study underscores the critical role of museum educators in Türkiye, revealing both the potential and the structural challenges inherent in the profession. While museum education has increasingly been recognized as an essential component of contemporary museology, the findings demonstrate that the professional status of museum educators remains ambiguous within institutional frameworks. The absence of a formally established professional identity, coupled with the expectation that museum educators assume multiple responsibilities beyond their primary educational duties, has resulted in precarious working conditions, professional burnout, and inconsistencies in employment structures. Furthermore, limited institutional funding and inadequate accessibility measures continue to impede the development and implementation of comprehensive museum education programs.

Despite these constraints, museum educators persist in advancing innovative, participatory, and audience-centered learning experiences that extend beyond conventional didactic approaches. Their contributions are particularly significant in fostering lifelong learning, enhancing cultural literacy, and promoting engagement through interactive and digital pedagogical strategies. However, the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of museum education necessitate a structured policy framework that formally recognizes museum educators as distinct professionals within the field. This includes the establishment of standardized career pathways, the provision of continuous professional development opportunities, and the allocation of sustainable funding to support educational initiatives.

Moving forward, the integration of digital technologies, interdisciplinary collaborations with academic institutions, and the development of inclusive educational strategies will be imperative in ensuring that museum education remains both relevant and accessible to diverse audiences. Addressing the structural deficiencies identified in this study through strategic institutional reforms will not only enhance the professional standing of museum educators but also reinforce museums as dynamic, inclusive, and participatory cultural institutions. By fostering a policy environment that prioritizes museum education, stakeholders can contribute to the long-term advancement of the sector, ensuring that museums continue to serve as vital spaces for learning, cultural exchange, and intellectual inquiry.

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