Vocational Training and Transition to Industry Experiences of Graduates from Food and Beverage Services Courses at Public Education Centers on the Anatolian Side of Istanbul

Büşra Bahar Taştekin[1] and Barış Yalınkılıç[1*]

[1] *Istanbul Gedik University, Faculty of Architecture and Design, Department of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts, 34876, Kartal, İstanbul, Türkiye*

Abstract

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological research design to examine the reasons for participating in culinary training offered at Public Education Centers (PECs), experiences during the training process, and perceptions of the training's role in job entry, workplace adaptation, and vocational identity development among graduates working in the food and beverage sector. The study population consisted of individuals who had completed food and beverage services courses at PECs located on the Anatolian Side of Istanbul and were employed in the sector. The data were collected between May and June 2026 through interviews with 36 participants. In the data analysis, participants' views were grouped under five themes and eight subthemes. Among these themes, the most frequently coded main theme was "Training Process," followed by the main themes of "Vocational and Social Outcomes" and "PEC Training in the Industry Context." The findings indicate that PEC training supports graduates' entry into employment through the acquisition of basic vocational competencies, their formal certification, stronger CVs, greater credibility with employers, increased self-confidence during job interviews, facilitated transition into a new sector, and a foundation for entrepreneurship. In addition, PEC training supports workplace adaptation by equipping individuals who are new to the profession with basic occupational knowledge, hygiene awareness, equipment-use skills, and production competencies. However, full and sustainable adaptation is possible only when basic training is complemented by workplace experience, continued participation in advanced training, adjustment to different kitchen environments, and the gradual assumption of greater responsibility within the professional hierarchy. PEC training also contributes to vocational identity development by enabling graduates to formally document their competencies and identify themselves as qualified culinary professionals.

Keywords: Public education centers, Food and beverage services courses, Culinary education.

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1. Introduction

Training in the field of gastronomy is of primary importance in shaping the skilled culinary workforce required by the food and beverage sector. At the formal education level, training in this field is offered through Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools as well as associate degree and undergraduate programs at universities. For individuals who have remained outside formal education, public and private non-formal education institutions fill an important gap in the process of transforming them into the qualified personnel needed in the field of food and beverage services (Dalahmetoglu, 2024).

In addition to private culinary schools, various studies have been conducted on students receiving training in public non-formal education institutions such as İSMEK, as well as on the instructors and administrators of these institutions. These studies have focused on topics such as students' satisfaction with their education, their motivations for enrolling in courses, evaluations of the training, instructors, training environments, and the ability of course graduates to remain in the sector (Olcaycan, 2018; Cankül and Abiş, 2023; Birsen and Yavuz, 2023; Cesur Kalkan, 2024; Eser, 2025; Yahyaoğlu, 2025; Enes, 2025; Duman and Durlu Özkaya, 2025). Studies on PECs and the training offered in these institutions, however, have mostly focused on courses outside the

* Corresponding Author: Barış Yalınkılıç
Email: baris.yalinkilic@gedik.edu.tr
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field of gastronomy, as well as on instructors and administrators working in PECs. Some of the studies conducted on PECs have aimed to evaluate the curricula and modules implemented in different training fields from the perspectives of students and instructors. Indeed, the literature includes studies on course and program content in areas such as Turkish Folk Music (Hüseyinoğlu, 2019), Jewelry Design Training Programs (Üresin Tanık, 2019), and Needle Lace Course Programs (Göral, 2019). On the other hand, there are numerous studies examining training processes and outcomes in PECs from the perspectives of trainees (Özengi and Şahan, 2017; Turgut, 2018), teachers (Güzel & Kirazoğlu, 2020), administrators (Nazlı & Özer, 2021; Gürsoy, 2024), and course content (Oktay, 2017). These studies, however, provide general evaluations of PECs and do not specifically focus on culinary courses. In the literature, only one study was identified that directly examined the views of trainees who had graduated from culinary training programs offered at PECs (Dalahmetoglu, 2024); however, that study evaluated graduates' perspectives on gastronomy tourism. Compared to trainees who have only recently completed their education, individuals who have gained post-graduation experience and are actively working in the sector are likely to evaluate the training they received retrospectively and from different perspectives. When the existing studies are considered, no study has been found that provides a multidimensional evaluation of culinary courses offered at PECs from the perspective of graduates who are actively working in the sector after completing these courses. In this context, the present study focuses on the effects of culinary training offered at PECs on graduates' job entry, workplace adaptation, and vocational identity development.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Lifelong learning

In Türkiye, culinary education is categorically offered to students through two different forms: formal and non-formal education. Formal culinary education is provided by Vocational and Technical High Schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education, as well as by associate degree and undergraduate programs at public and foundation universities. Unlike formal education, various non-formal education practices are also available in culinary training. Private culinary schools and kitchen academies established by well-known chefs in the sector, as well as culinary courses offered by different public institutions, can be cited as examples of non-formal education courses (Birdir and Kılıçhan, 2013). Non-formal education practices in the field of culinary arts in Türkiye are supervised and evaluated by the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning.

The General Directorate of Lifelong Learning has a mission that encompasses various non-formal education institutions and is responsible for supervising and evaluating these institutions. Established in 1926 as the Public Education Branch, this structure is currently organized under the name of the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning, comprising nine departments, Maturation Institutes, five different types of open education schools, and PECs. Non-formal education programs offered under the umbrella of the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning are prepared in accordance with the Framework Course Program approved by the Board of Education and Discipline. The necessary information for course programs approved by the General Directorate is uploaded to the digital system, and course materials related to the relevant program are also developed to ensure that training is delivered in parallel across different units. According to 2024 data, within the system affiliated with the General Directorate, there were 2,264 vocational and technical course programs prepared and approved for different age groups across 75 different learning areas, in addition to 1,105 general course programs. In PECs and Maturation Institutes operating under the institution, a total of 3,819 personnel worked in administrative positions, alongside 5,893 full-time teachers and 134,812 contracted master instructors. When instructor profiles are examined, educators include teachers and master instructors employed by the Ministry, academic staff working at universities, contracted master instructors, and employees of public institutions who hold undergraduate degrees in the relevant field of need (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of National Education [Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı; MEB], 2024). The appointment processes of master instructors and teachers working as instructors in culinary courses are carried out in accordance with the Regulation on Lifelong Learning Institutions. Eligible instructors include teachers specializing in Food and Beverage Services, academic staff working in relevant university departments and programs, associate degree and undergraduate graduates of these departments and programs, graduates of vocational and technical secondary education institutions providing education in the relevant field, and individuals who have received at least Level 4 training in the field of culinary arts (Türkiye's General Directorate of Lifelong Learning [Hayat Boyu Öğrenme Genel Müdürlüğü; HBÖGM],

2025a). The competence level of master instructors is of vital importance in ensuring the success of training offered at PECs and increasing the satisfaction that students gain from the course. The fact that instructors are well-trained and competent in their field is important for enabling trainees to acquire the intended learning outcomes, and it is also known that the interest and tolerant attitude of master instructors make a significant contribution to trainees' continuation in education and their post-training satisfaction (Ata, 2016).

According to the Regulation on Lifelong Learning Institutions, non-formal education course programs are divided into two subcategories: "Vocational and Technical Courses" and "General Courses." Face-to-face training offered at PECs and Maturation Institutes is implemented in line with these categories. According to 2024 statistical data, a total of 388,458 face-to-face courses were opened under both categories within the scope of non-formal education, and 6,493,700 individuals participated in these courses (MEB, 2024). The profile of trainees participating in these programs may be influenced by demographic factors such as gender, age, and educational level. When the student profile is examined, it is seen that both male and female individuals show interest in these courses. Depending on the content of the course offered, individuals with no formal education may participate in some courses, as may individuals who have graduated from various educational levels, ranging from primary school to postgraduate education (Bektaş Bedir, 2019).

According to 2024 data, the top three provinces where vocational and technical education courses, including culinary courses, were opened most frequently were Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir, respectively. Among all regions across the country, the Marmara Region had the highest number of courses and trainees. When the provinces in the Marmara Region are examined in terms of non-formal education course and trainee data, including both General Courses and Vocational and Technical Courses, Istanbul had the highest number of courses (47,386) and trainees (864,319) among 11 provinces. When courses and trainees are evaluated categorically, 13,076 of the 47,386 courses and 293,582 of the 864,319 trainees were in the Vocational and Technical Courses category. According to 2024 data for Istanbul, 3.86% of the total provincial population, aged between 25-64, benefited from education offered within the scope of non-formal education (MEB, 2024).

2.2. Training at PECs

All activities that take place outside the regular and systematic education individuals receive during their school life, throughout the period from birth to death, constitute the fundamental basis of lifelong learning institutions (Saydım, 2024). Under the umbrella of educational institutions affiliated with the Ministry of National Education, there are various compulsory and optional levels of education and educational opportunities offered at specific ages and periods. In addition to these formal education opportunities, there are also educational institutions that provide individuals who have either received such education or, due to various problems, have remained outside formal education, with the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills in later periods of life through the philosophy of lifelong learning. Within the authority and responsibility of the Ministry of National Education, numerous theoretical and practical training opportunities are offered through public and private courses for individuals who wish to continue their personal development through their own efforts. Among these institutions, PECs, with their long-standing educational experience and infrastructure, provide training opportunities for such individuals. PECs accept a wide range of learners, from illiterate individuals and homemakers to those who have specialized in different professions and wish to acquire new knowledge as a hobby or further specialize in their existing occupation. They offer various courses to learners in both socio-cultural and vocational fields (Bilgin et al., 2017). In Türkiye, within this scope, there are 1,000 PECs providing non-formal education under the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning. Through public education, individuals are trained for employment in areas needed by society by supporting the social, cultural, and vocational development of the public (Saydım, 2024).

One of the main reasons why PECs are important is that they do not impose an age limit. There are various courses suitable for all age groups, allowing individuals of all ages, from children to older adults, to participate. In this way, individuals can improve themselves by attending courses in many areas of interest, such as music, handicrafts, and vocational training, from childhood to adulthood. Within the scope of lifelong learning, the role of PECs is considered an important factor in individuals' applications to these institutions, as they appeal to everyone, are accessible in many locations, are opened in accordance with individual needs, involve various collaborators and joint activities, enable individuals to participate in vocational courses aimed at employment, contribute to

raising individuals who are beneficial to society, and progress in a planned and systematic manner by remaining open to innovation and continuously developing different programs in various fields (Saydım, 2024).

Operating with the philosophy of lifelong learning, PECs offer course participation opportunities not only to individuals who have established a strong place for themselves in social life, but also to individuals who have difficulty socializing or who have been unable to receive income-generating vocational training due to certain life challenges, such as individuals with disabilities or former convicts. Moreover, they provide various disadvantaged groups, particularly homemakers who were unable to work or participate in economic life because they did not receive education or acquire a profession in their earlier lives, with the opportunity to generate income even during the training process (Bektaş Bedir, 2019).

For a course requested to be opened at PECs, it is first necessary and compulsory to create a classroom or workshop environment suitable for the in-class activities and materials required by the course. The course-opening process is initiated in line with demand and need. Subsequently, the course program to be opened is examined in terms of its compliance with the Regulation on Lifelong Learning Institutions, and the course is started if it is found appropriate. The person who will provide training in the relevant course is selected from among master instructors, teachers, or experts in the field. In line with demand, the name of the course to be opened is determined, and the location where the course will be held, the course start date, and the days and hours of instruction are entered into the system to complete the course-opening process.

Trainees first log into the e-Yaygın system through e-Government at https://e-yaygin.meb.gov.tr and submit a preliminary application for the course they wish to attend. They then visit the institution to complete their final registration (HBÖGM, 2025b). Applications for training offered at PECs are submitted by logging into the system via https://e-yaygin.meb.gov.tr/, and the course to be attended is selected through the page https://e-yaygin.meb.gov.tr/pageKurslar.aspx. When the courses offered by PECs throughout Türkiye between January and June 2026 are examined, it is seen that a total of 15,617 courses were opened. Program and module information regarding the opened courses is available at https://e-yaygin.meb.gov.tr/pagePrograms.aspx.

PECs offer a wide variety of course options related to the field of food and beverage services. Students may attend these courses simultaneously, or a trainee who completes one course may enroll in another. When courses offered throughout Türkiye are examined, particularly through the program information available at https://e-yaygin.meb.gov.tr/pagePrograms.aspx, it is seen that a wide range of practical training programs related to the field of food and beverage services, from pastry training to Turkish cuisine, have been approved. Within the scope of these courses, the primary aim is to provide trainees with the knowledge and skills related to occupational health and safety required by the kitchen environment. In addition, the courses aim to ensure that trainees work in accordance with the rules included in documentation related to quality assurance systems, while also adopting approaches aimed at protecting and preserving the environment. Furthermore, the courses aim to ensure that production is carried out in accordance with national and international legal regulations and that trainees develop the ability to make personal preparations, comply with hygiene rules, and use kitchen areas and equipment appropriately throughout all processes (HBÖGM, 2025a). The duration of training offered at PECs varies depending on the content and number of modules. For instance, while the “fresh cake making course” and the “Turkish cuisine course” last 248 hours and 226 hours, respectively, the “simit and poğaça making course” is completed after 122 hours of training (HBÖGM, 2025c; HBÖGM, 2025d; HBÖGM, 2025e).

The course documents used in PEC courses and the materials containing product preparation information and recipes are available on the website of the General Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education at https://meslek.meb.gov.tr/moduller. Training processes are carried out within a specific system based on these documents, which are prepared separately for each module.

3. Method

3.1. Research Problem and Purpose

PECs are institutions where individuals are offered practical and theoretical training within the scope of non-formal education. Within these institutions, training is provided in the field of food and beverage services, as in many other fields. The training offered at PECs is important in meeting the sector’s need for skilled personnel. This makes it necessary to examine the training provided in these institutions in terms of both its processes and outcomes in order to evaluate its effectiveness. Although there are various studies in the literature on culinary training offered by private or public non-formal education institutions (Olcaycan, 2018; Cankül and Abiş, 2023; Birsen and Yavuz, 2023;

Cesur Kalkan, 2024; Eser, 2025; Yahyaoğlu, 2025; Enes, 2025; Duman and Durlu Özkaya, 2025), the number of studies focusing specifically on culinary training offered at PECs is quite limited (Dalahmetoglu, 2024). Compared to trainees who have only recently completed their education, individuals who have gained experience after graduation and are actively working in the sector are likely to evaluate the training they received retrospectively and from different perspectives. In this context, it is important to consider the views of course graduates who completed culinary training at PECs and are actively working in the sector in order to evaluate these courses from different perspectives. Accordingly, the research question guiding the present study is: "How do graduates of culinary training at PECs make sense of their reasons for enrolling, their training experiences, and the role of training in entering the food and beverage sector, adapting to the workplace, and developing a vocational identity?" This study sought to answer this research question.

3.2. Research method

Qualitative research is an approach used to examine events and phenomena that occur within social life. This approach has become increasingly common in research conducted in the social sciences and enables situations and phenomena to be examined comprehensively and realistically within their natural context through techniques such as interviews and text analysis (Yalçın, 2022). Although this approach does not allow for generalization to the entire population, it enables researchers to reach conclusions through repeatable generalizations on a research topic depending on the dynamics of social life within different situations and limitations (Baltacı, 2019). In this context, the qualitative research method was employed in the present study.

In qualitative research, there are five different research designs developed to enable researchers to proceed within a specific framework. Phenomenology is one of these five qualitative research designs. Phenomenology is a qualitative research design that examines how people make sense of their experiences from their own subjective perspectives. In this design, the question "What is reality?" is addressed through data obtained from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, primarily through in-depth interviews (Yalçın, 2022). Since interviews were conducted with individuals who had graduated from culinary training programs offered at PECs and were working in the sector regarding their past and present life experiences, a phenomenological design was used in this study (Aydın, 2022).

3.3. Population and Sample

The study population consisted of graduates who had received training in the field of food and beverage services at PECs located in the districts on the Anatolian Side of Istanbul and who were working in the sector. Since a population may generally consist of a large number of individuals, studies are often conducted with smaller groups, referred to as samples, in order to obtain the desired information and outcomes regarding the population. A sample consists of individuals selected from the population related to the research topic and possessing the quality and quantity required to represent the population from which they are selected (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012, as cited in Koç Başaran, 2017).

Purposive sampling, which is commonly used in qualitative research, is frequently employed to reach a limited number of individuals who are knowledgeable and experienced in relation to the research topic. There are various sampling methods used within the scope of purposive sampling (Yağar and Dökme, 2018). Among these methods, criterion sampling is particularly used when there are specific criteria determined by the researchers for the study (Koç Başaran, 2017).

In the present study, graduate trainees were reached through administrators and instructors working at PECs on the Anatolian Side of Istanbul, and participants were included in the study using criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods. Accordingly, the criteria for inclusion in the study were having successfully completed a culinary course at a PEC located on the Anatolian Side of Istanbul and having worked as a cook in the food and beverage sector for at least six months. The interviews were continued until the responses began to show similarity, and the number of participants was determined as 36. Participation was based on voluntariness.

3.4. Limitations of the Study

Interviews were conducted with graduates who had received training in the field of food and beverage services at PECs located on the Anatolian Side of Istanbul and who had been actively working in the sector for at least six months. Graduates who were not working in the sector after completing the course, those who had worked in the sector but later left it, and graduate trainees with less than six months of active work experience were not included in the study. On the other hand, since no training in the field of food and beverage services was offered at Ataşehir and

Çekmeköy PECs on the Anatolian Side of Istanbul, graduates of these PECs were not included in the scope of the study. In addition, trainees with active student status and individuals who had completed the course but were not working in the food and beverage sector were also excluded from the study.

3.5. Data Collection Tools

A semi-structured interview form including demographic information and questions related to the study was developed. During the preparation of the topic-related questions included in the semi-structured interview form, a literature review was conducted, with particular focus on studies involving individuals who had graduated through non-formal education channels in the field of culinary arts (Olcaycan, 2018; Dalahmetoglu, 2024; Cesur Kalkan, 2024; Enes, 2025; Duman and Durlu Özkaya, 2025). The prepared interview questions were submitted for review to two field experts actively working as instructors in culinary courses offered at PECs, two trainees who had graduated from these courses, and two academic experts in the field of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts. Based on the feedback received, the questions were finalized.

3.6. Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, various conceptual strategies are used to ensure the validity and reliability of the topic under investigation; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are examples of these concepts (Kılınç, 2018). In order to establish the validity and reliability of the present study, the interview questions were prepared after a detailed literature review and by taking into account the opinions of instructors working at PECs, trainees who had graduated from these courses, and academic experts in the field of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts. During the study, the data were collected by the researcher in as much depth as possible through prolonged face-to-face interaction. During the examination of the data, participants were contacted to obtain confirmation regarding the findings. These procedures contributed to meeting the credibility criterion of the study. Interviews were conducted with graduates who had received training in the field of food and beverage services at PECs located on the Anatolian Side of Istanbul and who had been actively working in the sector for at least six months. Graduates who were not working in the sector after completing the course, those who had worked in the sector but later left it, and graduate trainees with less than six months of active work experience were not included in the study. In addition, while examining participants' views, the researcher provided detailed descriptions and presented the findings directly through quotations from participants' statements without adding interpretation. The transferability criterion was ensured by using criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, by reporting the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the participant profile, and by avoiding individual interpretation during data analysis in order to preserve the nature of the data. The process of developing the interview questions, the functioning of the data collection process, and the data analysis procedures were reported in detail. After the data were collected, they were transcribed, and the verbal statements were converted into written text in a digital environment. In the study, in which triangulation was used, the data were coded separately by the researcher and the advisor after data collection, and the process was repeated at least three times in order to ensure coding agreement. The data were analyzed using the MAXQDA software. Based on the data, codes, themes, and subthemes were developed; the findings were then structured and subsequently discussed in light of the existing literature. Through these procedures, the principle of dependability was ensured. The findings were presented to the participants and to the advisor faculty member for confirmation, and their accuracy was checked. In addition, an ethics committee approval was obtained (approval date: May 4, 2026; E-25155520-050.04-2026.173337.75) from İstanbul Gedik University before the study, and voluntary informed consent forms were collected from the participants. In this way, the principle of confirmability was ensured.

3.7. Interview Details and Data Analysis

After obtaining ethics committee approval, the informed consent form was delivered either in person or digitally to the participants, who were reached through administrators and instructors working at PECs located on the Anatolian Side of Istanbul. Interviews were conducted with individuals who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The interviews with the participants were carried out either face to face or by telephone using a semi-structured interview form. During the interviews, participants' responses were recorded using an audio recording device, and the audio recordings were subsequently transcribed. The names of the participants were kept anonymous, and each participant was assigned a code. The interviews lasted between 7 and 20 minutes. The data collection process was completed between May and June 2026. The data obtained from the interviews

were examined using a descriptive analysis approach, and codes related to the research topic were generated. Subsequently, statements carrying common meanings were grouped under thematic headings, and the MAXQDA software was used during the analysis process.

Within the scope of the study, participants were asked questions regarding their demographic information, including gender, age, educational level, the name and year of the course attended at the PEC, their current position and type of workplace. Besides, the semi-structured interview form included nine open-ended questions addressing participants' motivations for attending the courses, their experiences of the training process, the adequacy of the physical environment, instructors, equipment and course content, the vocational and social outcomes of the training, its contribution to employment entry, workplace adaptation and vocational identity development, difficulties experienced during the transition to the sector, and recommendations for improving the training programs.

4. Findings

The information about the participants was presented under the heading of demographic distribution, and their responses were analyzed under the heading of research findings.

4.1. Demographic Distribution

Three of the participants were male, while 33 were female. The ages of the participants ranged between 18 and 57. In terms of educational level, two participants had completed primary school, three had completed secondary school, 25 had completed high school, two held associate degrees, three held undergraduate degrees, and one held a master's degree. While 23 of the participants had preferred training within one of the categories of cookery, pastry, or Turkish cuisine, 10 participants had received training in two of these categories, and three participants had participated in training programs covering all three categories. Although the years in which the participants received training varied, their training dates ranged from 2016 to 2025. When the participants' current workplaces were examined, it was determined that some participants were working as cooks or master instructors in public institutions, five participants were working in the catering sector, eight participants were working in cafés/patisseries, nine participants were working in kitchens belonging to various private enterprises, six participants were working in restaurants, and the remaining participants were working in places such as eateries, hotels, kindergartens, and school canteens. When their current positions were examined, it was found that six participants were working as assistant cooks, 17 as cooks, and four as pastry chefs, while the remaining participants were working in positions such as business owner/operator, head cook, demi chef, cold kitchen chef, and kitchen commis.

4.2. Research Findings

In the data analysis, participants' views were grouped under five themes and eight subthemes. Among these themes, the main theme with the highest number of code assignments was "Training Process," followed by the main themes of "Vocational and Social Outcomes" and "PEC Training in the Industry Context." Data regarding the themes, subthemes, and codes are presented below.

4.2.1. Motivations for participating in training

In order to evaluate the motivations of the participants for attending the training programs offered at PECs, the existing data were analyzed using the MAXQDA software, and the theme "Motivations for Participating in Training" was developed. The codes under this theme are presented in Figure 1 through the Hierarchical Code–Subcode Segments Model generated by the relevant software.

Based on the analysis of the participants' views explaining their purposes for participating in culinary training offered at PECs, the theme "Motivations for Participating in Training" was developed, along with nine different codes under this theme. When the theme and codes are examined, it is seen that participants' purposes for attending the training programs were multidimensional. Considering the coding frequency, the motivations of "Learning and Self-Improvement" and "Obtaining a Certificate" came to the forefront. While "Interest and Curiosity" in culinary training emerged as another code explaining individuals' motivation for participating in the training, the codes "Aim of Finding a Job," "Acquiring an Occupation," and "Intention to Start a Business" reflected motivations related to employment and entrepreneurship. In terms of coding frequency, the codes "Developing a Hobby," "Making Use of Leisure Time," and "Friend Recommendation" represented secondary motivations for participating in the training. The codes under the theme "Motivations for Participating in Training" and sample participant statements representing these codes are presented in Table 1.

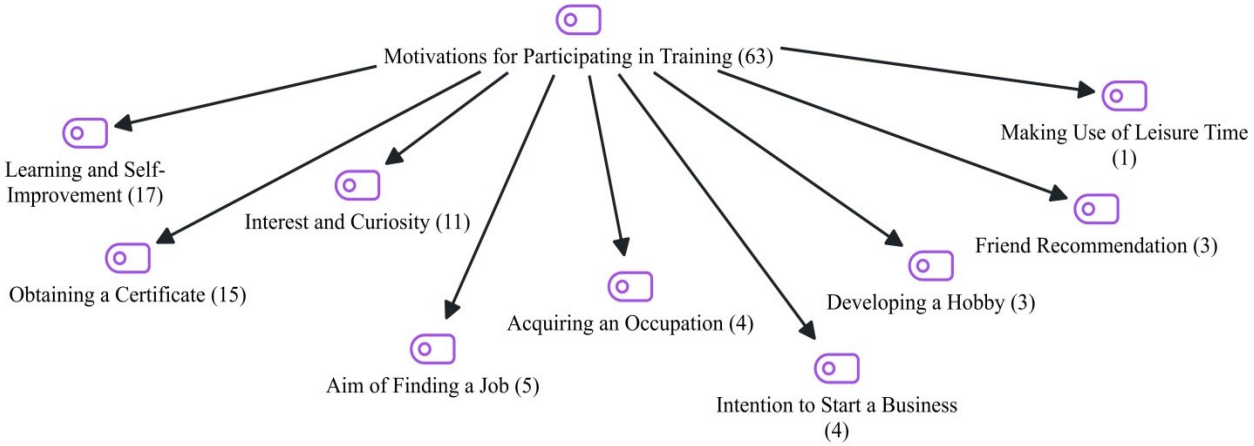


Figure 1. Motivations for participating in training

Table 1. Codes and sample quotations for the theme of motivations for participating in training

Theme	Code	Quotation
Motivations for Participating in Training	Learning and Self-Improvement	"*I wanted to improve myself further in the field of pastry because I was interested in it, and I wanted to advance myself in that area.*" P2 "*My purpose for participating in the training was actually to improve myself in my profession and to learn things I did not know. I am a cook, but I participated in order to gain experience in the pastry department as well.*" P30
	Obtaining a Certificate	"*Since I entered the profession without formal training, I did not have a certificate, and there were also subjects related to the profession that I did not know. One of my main reasons was to obtain a certificate.*" P13 "*My aim was to obtain a certificate rather than to receive training.*" P3
	Interest and Curiosity	"*I had been interested in the kitchen since my childhood. Courses seemed more attractive than going to university for culinary training.*" P5 "*I was very interested in the kitchen. I wanted to work in this field, but when my family did not allow me to work, I started attending courses.*" P15
	Aim of Finding a Job	"*I participated in order to work in kitchens…*" P20 "*I participated because it could create a job opportunity.*" P12
	Acquiring an Occupation	"*I participated in the training to acquire an occupation for myself.*" P8 "*I participated in these trainings because I wanted to have an occupation.*" P9
	Intention to Start a Business	"*Actually, at that time, I had an idea of opening a café…*" P24 "*Before attending the course, I had always wanted to open a place of my own.*" P6
	Developing a Hobby	"*I participated as a hobby at first, but later, because I enjoyed it, I wanted to pursue it as a job as well.*" P35
	Friend Recommendation	"*A friend had attended the course. I was also looking for a course to participate in at that time. While I was thinking about whether it would work out or not, I asked my friend what the instructor was like. When she said the instructor was very good, I started the course that way.*" P4
	Making Use of Leisure Time	"*I was not working at that time. I wanted to make use of my free time.*" P16

4.2.2. Training process

In order to evaluate the participants' process-based perspectives on the training offered at PECs, the existing data were analyzed using the MAXQDA software, and the theme "Training Process" was developed. The subthemes and codes under this theme are presented in Figure 2 through the Hierarchical Code–Subcode Segments Model generated by the relevant software.

The data evaluated under the theme "Training Process" were coded under the subthemes of "Training Environment," "Quality of Training," and "Evaluation of the Training." When the coding frequencies were examined, it was observed that the most intensive coding was carried out under the subthemes of "Training Environment" and "Quality of Training," respectively.

The subtheme "Training Environment" included the codes "Kitchen, Equipment, and Materials," "Instructor Influence," and "Social Environment." This subtheme covers participants' evaluations of the physical conditions of the practice kitchens where they received training, the adequacy of the tools and equipment in the kitchen and the food materials used in production, the role of the instructor delivering the course in the training process, and the social environment of the course setting.

Under the subtheme "Quality of Training," the codes "Technical and Theoretical Depth," "Curriculum," and "Training Duration" were developed. These codes cover the scope of theoretical and practical knowledge and skill provided in culinary courses at PECs, the extent to which the module curriculum met participants' expectations, and the evaluation of the relevant courses in terms of duration.

Under the theme "Training Process," the subtheme with the lowest coding frequency was "Evaluation of the Training." Under this subtheme, the codes "Perceiving the Training as Sufficient," "Perceiving the Training as Insufficient," and "Perceiving the Training as Partially Sufficient" were developed. The subthemes and codes under the theme "Training Process," along with sample quotations associated with these codes, are presented in Table 2.

4.2.3. Vocational and social outcomes

In order to evaluate the vocational and social outcomes acquired by the participants as a result of the training offered at PECs, the interview data were analyzed using the MAXQDA software, and the theme "Vocational and Social Outcomes" was developed. The subthemes and codes under this theme are presented in Figure 3 through the Hierarchical Code–Subcode Segments Model generated by the software.

The theme "Vocational and Social Outcomes" was examined under the subthemes of "Vocational Outcomes" and "Social Outcomes." When the coding frequencies were examined, it was observed that the most intensive coding was carried out under the subtheme "Vocational Outcomes." Six different codes were developed under this subtheme, and it was observed that the code "Theoretical Knowledge and Technical Skills" was coded most frequently, with participants emphasizing both technical and theoretical vocational outcomes gained as a result of the training.

Participants' views regarding the acquisition of vocational identity, obtaining a certificate, acquiring a new occupation or being promoted in their current jobs, developing teamwork skills, and obtaining economic benefits as a result of their work were grouped under the other codes. These codes cover issues such as the sense of competence that the certificates obtained after training provided to participants in the culinary field, the easier adoption of vocational identity, entering employment after training, experiencing position changes or promotion, team-oriented working skills, and transforming the training into economic gain.

Under the subtheme "Social Outcomes," the highest coding frequency was related to "Increased Self-Confidence," while "Socialization" and "Making Friends" emerged as other important codes. These findings indicate that culinary training offered at PECs not only provides individuals with technical knowledge and skills, but also increases their self-confidence in a vocational sense. The codes "Socialization" and "Making Friends" cover the contributions of the training environment to individuals in terms of establishing social relationships. The subthemes and codes under the theme "Vocational and Social Outcomes," together with sample participant statements associated with these codes, are presented in Table 3.

4.2.4. PEC training in the industry context

In order to determine how participants evaluated the culinary training offered at PECs in terms of industry experience and workplace practices, the interview data were analyzed using the MAXQDA software, and the theme "PEC Training in the Industry Context" was developed. The subthemes and codes under this theme are presented in Figure 4 through the Hierarchical Code–Subcode Segments Model generated by the relevant software.

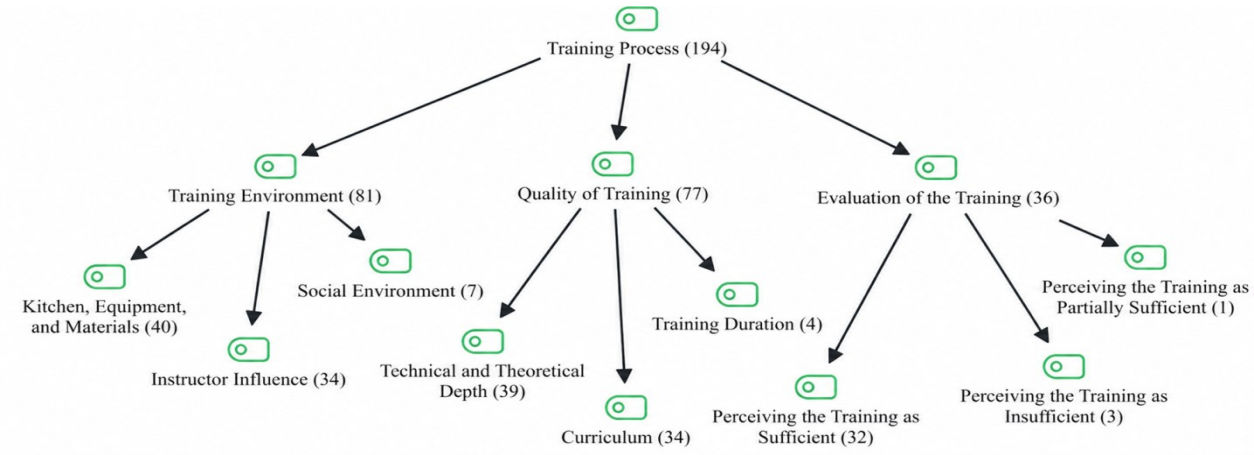


Figure 2. Training process

Table 2. Codes and sample quotations for the theme of training process

Theme	Subtheme	Code	Quotation
Training Process	Training Environment	Kitchen, Equipment, and Materials	"*The kitchen environment was very small considering the number of people attending the course.*" P5 "*At first, there was no equipment. We had a lot of difficulty. We, as students, bought everything, even the forks and spoons.*" P18 "*We had a nice kitchen, and all facilities were provided. The equipment was also sufficient.*" P16 "*It was sufficient, but we had some deficiencies. We bought the products ourselves by collecting money among us.*" P6
		Instructor Influence	"*I respect all of them because of their understanding and patience. It was very nice that they did not discriminate against anyone.*" P1 "*The instructor was truly teaching with enthusiasm. She also explained the subjects patiently to those who did not know.*" P31
		Social Environment	"*We had an enjoyable kitchen environment consisting entirely of women.*" P5 "*During the day, we were divided into groups according to our recipes and conducted the lesson by producing dishes. At the end of the lesson, we set our table, chatted, and evaluated the day in terms of what we had done incompletely.*" P15
	Quality of Training	Technical and Theoretical Depth	"*Frankly, I learned many things I did not know. I saw the applicability of kitchen practices and learned how to work according to a recipe.*" P8 "*We learned practical tips on different subjects, from cutting techniques to cooking techniques, and had the chance to access in-depth theoretical knowledge about the kitchen.*" P16
		Curriculum	"*What we would do each day was determined the day before. Our instructor sent the recipe, and we proceeded practically by looking at our recipes based on that formula.*" P2 "*We started with soups at the beginning. Then we continued with olive oil dishes, kebabs, meat dishes, and desserts.*" P14 "*We definitely had exams. We even had a dishwashing grade.*" P1
		Training Duration	"*Since the duration of the course was short, the training process was also brief.*" P6
	Graduates' Assessment of the Training	Perceiving the Training as Sufficient	"*For me, first of all, it was very productive. I gained more than I expected. I attended the course with pleasure.*" P32 "*It went very well. I benefited from it a lot. I think I received quality training. I learned many things.*" P20
		Perceiving the Training as Insufficient	"*I do not think we covered the subjects in detail. I do not think the content of Turkish cuisine is limited to this.*" P14
		Perceiving the Training as Partially Sufficient	"It was moderately sufficient. It was not fully sufficient." P2

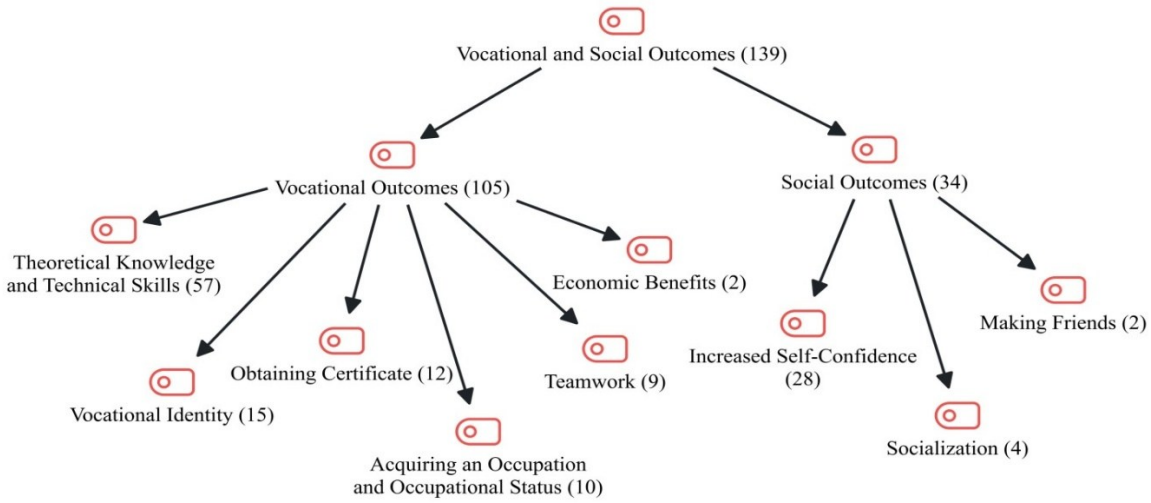


Figure 3. Vocational and social outcomes

Table 3. Codes and sample quotations for the theme of vocational and social outcomes

Theme	Subtheme	Code	Quotation
Vocational and Social Outcomes	Vocational Outcomes	Theoretical Knowledge and Technical Skills	"*In terms of skills, I learned how to use a knife correctly and quickly, and where and how equipment should be used properly. The practical exams also contributed a lot to me. Preparing and presenting a menu within minutes and being able to notice small, invisible details added a lot to me.*" P13 "*By learning the techniques, I specialized in boutique pastry and flower training. Previously, I knew how to make cakes only at a very amateur level, but now I have started to provide training in this field…*" P22 "*We did everything, from the cake base to the coating and cream. Now, for example, I can make a cake by myself, from the cake base to the decoration. Cookies, poğaças, milk-based desserts, and syrup-based desserts… I am at a level where I can produce most of the things we learned in the course on my own.*" P2
		Vocational Identity	"*At least you can say, 'I am a master, I am a master instructor.' I used to be a homemaker; I achieved many things.*" P10 "*Visibility. I do this job. Expressing this verbally, especially for someone who is just starting out, I can definitely define it as visibility.*" P3
		Obtaining Certificate	"*I had started the training because my aim was to obtain a certificate. Since the certificates also appeared in e-Government, it was very useful. When you go to a workplace for a job interview and they ask you to describe your experience in this field, you can only explain it or show it in practice; but when they ask you to show proof, you simply show your certificate.*" P18 "*Being able to say 'I have a certificate' gives a different impression. In a job interview, it is definitely more pleasant and confidence-building to stand out with your certificates rather than just talking.*" P16
		Acquiring an Occupation and Occupational Status	"*I became a staff member who could be used in every area. That is how I am in the establishment where I currently work. I can take part in hot kitchen, appetizer, and pastry production. I became a staff member who enriches this place.*" P31 "*When I first came, I was an apprentice cook. After the course, I became the head cook.*" P36
		Teamwork	"*We learned how to adapt and how to work within a group.*" P36 "*…We learned how to work as a group…*" P21
		Economic Benefits	"*The income I earn now provides very good support for my budget.*" P1
	Social Outcomes	Increased Self-Confidence	"*It gave me self-confidence. I became an example to my friends around me. I am a mother; I have two children. Seeing the joy of a mother achieving something in their eyes was a great happiness for me.*" P13 "*A vocational course affects a person's self-confidence. In other words, if you are doing something you know and have also attended a course, you can enter the sector more comfortably.*" P23
		Socialization	"*I socialized during the training. The training sessions were very enjoyable. Sometimes I think about those days and miss them.*" P21 "*I did not used to go out much, but after I started attending the course, that place felt like therapy to me.*" P29
		Making Friends	"*…I made many friends in the course…*" P1

The theme "PEC Training in the Industry Context" was developed based on participants' views in which they evaluated the training they received at PECs through their industry experiences. Under this theme, three subthemes were developed: "Industry Readiness," "Course-Workplace Practice Differences," and "Ease of Employment." The highest number of code assignments was grouped under the subtheme "Industry Readiness." This subtheme addressed the adequacy of culinary training offered at PECs in terms of preparation for the industry, as well as the importance of personal effort. Under this subtheme, the most intensive coding was grouped under the code "Viewing the Training as Sufficient for the Industry." This indicates that the majority of participants evaluated the practical training offered at PECs positively in terms of preparation for the industry.

The other two subthemes were "Course-Workplace Practice Differences" and "Ease of Employment." These subthemes respectively addressed the applicability of the training received in the course to the sector and the advantages provided by the training in entering employment in the sector. Under the subtheme "Course-Workplace Practice Differences," the most intensive coding was assigned to the code "Similarities Between Course and Workplace Practices." Under the subtheme "Ease of Employment," the highest number of code assignments was made to the code "Certificate Advantage in Job Entry," reflecting the role of the official certificate awarded after the training process in relation to employment. The subthemes and codes under the theme "PEC Training in the Industry Context," together with sample quotations associated with these codes, are presented in Table 4.

4.2.5. Recommendations for improving training

In order to determine participants' views on improving the culinary training offered at PECs, the interview data were analyzed using the MAXQDA software, and the theme "Recommendations for Improving Training" was developed. The codes under this theme are presented in Figure 5 through the Hierarchical Code–Subcode Segments Model generated by the relevant software.

A total of eight codes were developed under the theme "Recommendations for Improving Training." When the coding frequencies were examined, it was seen that the highest coding frequency was concentrated in the codes "Equipment and Technical Infrastructure" and "Training Duration and Schedule." These codes respectively cover the improvement of tools and utensils used in kitchens, professional kitchen equipment, and practice environments, as well as increasing course duration and the number of course days. In terms of coding intensity, these two codes were followed by "Increasing the Number of Courses and Modules" and "Financial Support." The code "Increasing the Number of Courses and Modules" includes participants' views on increasing the number of courses related to different types of cuisine and product varieties offered at PECs, as well as views on advanced-level training. The code "Financial Support" covers participants' views on the provision of materials needed during the lessons and the expenses related to practical applications. The code "Quota and Trainee Distribution" includes participants' views on classifying trainees and organizing the training environment more efficiently in terms of the number of students. The codes "Diversification of Training Locations" and "Increasing Kitchen Space and the Number of Kitchens" cover participants' views on increasing the number of locations where PECs provide practical culinary training, as well as increasing the number and physical size of the kitchens where these trainings are delivered. The final code under this theme is "Cooperation with the Private Sector," which reflects participants' views on possible collaborations that PECs could establish with private sector representatives in order to make the training process more efficient in terms of preparation for the industry. The codes under the theme "Recommendations for Improving Training," together with sample quotations associated with these codes, are presented in Table 5.

5. Discussion

Culinary training offered at PECs is delivered through courses with a defined framework and according to a specific curriculum based on the modules included in these courses (Dalahmetoglu, 2024). The fact that these trainings are made available to all segments of society makes the participant profile and individuals' motivations for participating in these trainings multidimensional (Eser, 2025). In the present study, it was determined that individuals' motivations for participating in culinary training offered at PECs were multidimensional, and that the most important motivational factors were "Learning and Self-Improvement" and "Obtaining a Certificate." The main underlying reason for this may be that individuals seek to improve their knowledge and skills in the culinary field, become more competent in the field of gastronomy, and enhance their vocational qualifications.

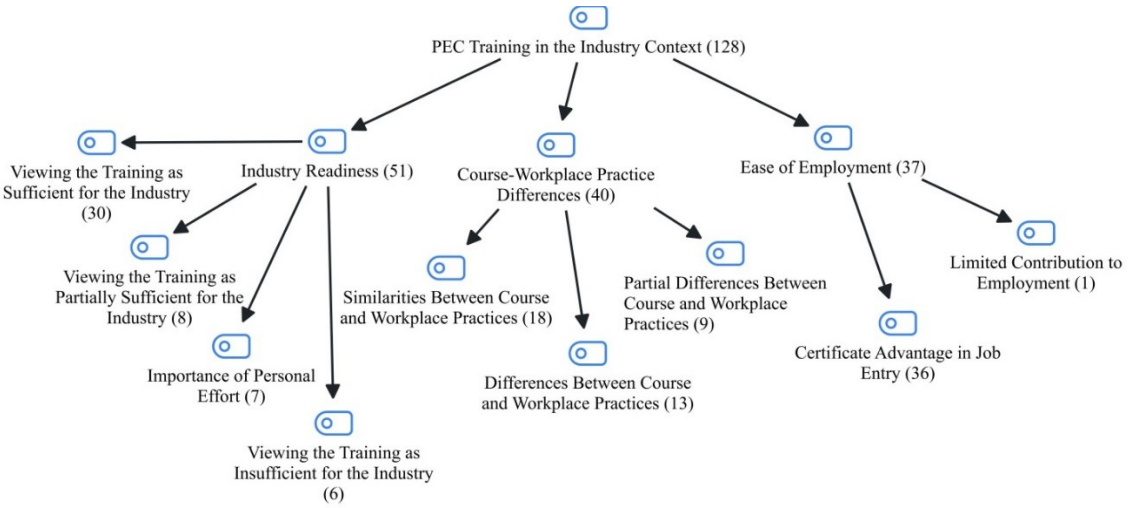


Figure 4. PEC training in the industry context

Table 4. Codes and sample quotations for the theme of PEC training in the industry context

Theme	Subtheme	Code	Quotation
PEC Training in the Industry Context	Industry Readiness	Viewing the Training as Sufficient for the Industry	"*It is a very difficult sector for a woman. For someone who really wants to learn, apprenticeship training is sufficient.*" P3 "*I think it is sufficient. If you know nothing, it contributes a lot to you.*" P25
		Viewing the Training as Partially Sufficient for the Industry	"*I cannot say that it fully met my expectations in terms of getting a job... It is not completely sufficient; perhaps it is sufficient at a level of 75%. You gain basic knowledge for a start.*" P10 "*It is partially sufficient. A person learns something in the course, and afterwards, if they find a working environment, they reinforce their experience.*" P12
		Importance of Personal Effort	"*If you need to build on what you have learned, you have to practice at home. Suppose you received pastry training. You learn by adding more and more to it.*" P1 "*It can be sufficient, but experience is very important. One needs to improve oneself.*" P20
		Viewing the Training as Insufficient for the Industry	"*I do not think it is sufficient for larger kitchens... one course is not enough.*" P5 "*I do not think it is sufficient. For that reason, I am considering continuing with different courses.*" P14
	Course-Workplace Practice Differences	Similarities Between Course and Workplace Practices	"*What I learned in the training also appeared in the workplace. Even the things I thought would not appear came up there. For example, when I saw a product, I said, 'We had made this in the course'.* " P21 "*I only added more to it; there is no difference. From the oils used to cake mixing and whisking techniques, I apply all of them in the workplace.*" P28
		Differences Between Course and Workplace Practices	"*You receive the training, but the business sector is something completely different. Most of the things we saw in the course are not applied there.*" P8 "*Yes, there are differences. For example, the master has a different production technique. In the practical part, the quality of the ingredients varies.*" P2 "*Since the people I work with in the workplace learned the profession through practice, they are not familiar with the information given in the course. Even in cutting techniques, they are not aware of the way they cut. There is no concrete difference, but the technical knowledge is different.*" P8
		Partial Differences Between Course and Workplace Practices	"*Every master has their own way of presentation. What we learned in the course contributed a lot to us... When your own mastery and what you learned in the course come together, good things emerge.*" P17 "*The system is the same, but the content is different. The number of people is different; I cook for 1,000 people here.*" P36
	Ease of Employment	Certificate Advantage in Job Entry	"*I worked as a cook in a kindergarten, and the first thing they asked for was the certificate. Apart from that, without a certificate, they do not offer a proper salary.*" P27 "*Yes, when I had previously looked for another job, they told me I had no experience or knowledge. When I came here, they hired me because I had a certificate.*" P35 "*It contributed greatly in my last job. After obtaining the certificate, I started working as a master. Before that, I was working as an assistant.*" P13
		Limited Contribution to Employment	"*That is, I think, something like a sore point. Unfortunately, rather than the certificates you have received, workplaces mostly look at your experience. For example, in a place where I applied as an assistant cook, I worked as a waitress. Frankly, the head cook's perception of you in the establishment is important. The same applies throughout the entire sector.*" P8

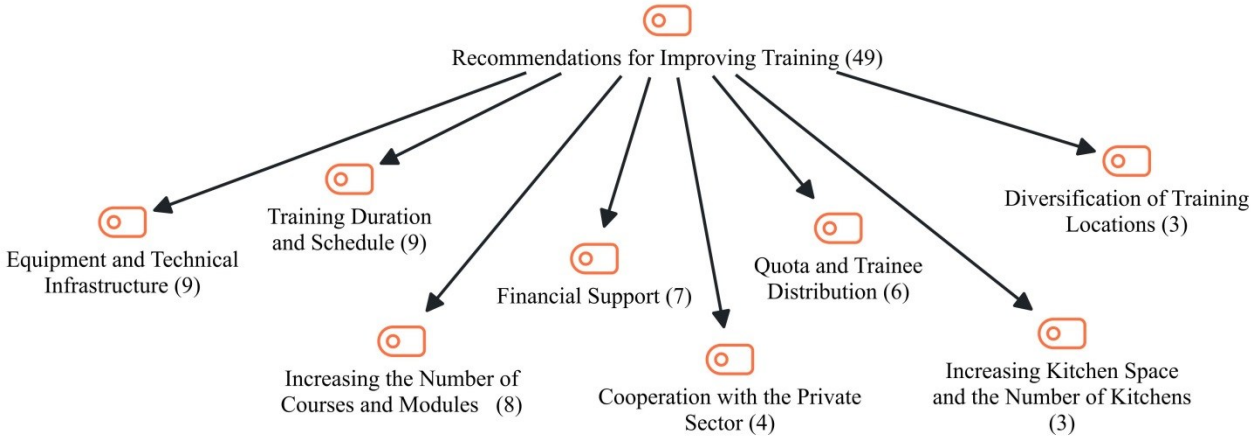


Figure 5. Recommendations for improving training

Table 5. Codes and sample quotations for the theme of recommendations for improving training

Theme	Code	Quotation
Recommendations for Improving Training	Equipment and Technical Infrastructure	"*In the coming years, a more professional kitchen and equipment would contribute much more to the efficiency of the training." P17* "*The equipment used in the kitchen environment could be more professional and closer to the machines used in the sector.*" P16
	Training Duration and Schedule	"*The biggest problem we experienced recently was the issue of time. I think efficiency could not be achieved in recipes and practice due to time limitations. Since course durations have been reduced, they are not efficient.*" P18 "*Training programs lasting several years could be organized in order to raise professionalism to much higher levels." P31* "*We attend on weekends. If it were also offered on weekday evenings, I would go 24/7.*" P19
	Increasing the Number of Courses and Modules	"*The number of modules in which we can receive training is limited. Culinary training is offered only in certain basic areas. I think module diversity should be increased.*" P11 "*Of course, the basic things are taught, but since pastry as a profession is related to commerce in real life, a commercial perspective could also be added. In other words, cost, profit, and loss calculations from a commercial perspective could be included as part of the training.*" P28
	Financial Support	"*Some people experience serious financial difficulties. Since people need to buy materials, they do not want to attend. I think at least half of the expenses of those participating in the training could be covered.*" P1 "*Since the materials are expensive, it would be good if the state provided some help and support. Some of those who want to attend the training can afford the materials, while others cannot.*" P6
	Quota and Trainee Distribution	"*There are problems during the application process. There are difficulties at the registration stage. For example, when registration opens for the pastry course, you need to be among the first to register. Otherwise, the quota fills up immediately. The quota could be increased for highly demanded trainings.*" P30 "*There are those who want to participate as a hobby, those who want it for work, and those who want it to be employed. If a survey was conducted and trainees were classified according to their purposes, it would be more efficient. Otherwise, those who come as a hobby may be absent. Those who come for a certificate are more willing to attend the lessons.*" P12
	Diversification of Training Locations	"*PEC trainings are available in few districts. For example, I come to the training location with two transfers. The number of training locations could be increased. We spend one and a half hours on the road.*" P27
	Increasing Kitchen Space and the Number of Kitchens	"*The number of kitchens could be increased.*" P35 "*It is also not sufficient in terms of space.*" P3
	Cooperation with the Private Sector	"*The trainings do not really provide much opportunity to become acquainted with the sector. In fact, trainees who come to PECs should be introduced to people in the sector and sector professionals so that those attending the course can find a job and make a start. But the current situation is not like that at all.*" P22 "*Workshops should be conducted at PECs by sector experts.*" P22

On the other hand, it is known that individuals working in the food and beverage sector may be required to present certain certificates or documents verifying their vocational competencies, depending on their positions within the enterprise. When the training offered at PECs is successfully completed, the training certificates provided to participants serve as official documents proving vocational competence for individuals who are currently employed or who plan to work in the future (Çetin and Akar Şahingöz, 2019). In this context, individuals' motivation to participate in the training offered at PECs is shaped not only by the learning process, but also by the opportunity to obtain a document demonstrating vocational competence. The fact that individuals' interest and curiosity in the kitchen from an early age can be addressed through culinary training offered at PECs constitutes another motivational factor in their participation in these trainings. In addition, the intention to find a job in the food and beverage sector, acquire a new occupation, or start a business indicates the role of employment- and entrepreneurship-oriented motivations in participation in these trainings. On the other hand, factors such as developing a hobby, making use of leisure time, and friend recommendation stand out as secondary motivational factors in participation in culinary training offered at PECs. This indicates that motivation to participate in training is shaped not only by vocational motives, but also by considerations such as developing personal interests, establishing a social environment, and spending leisure time through a meaningful activity. Similar to the findings of the present study, a study conducted on graduates of private culinary schools found that family and friend circles, interest in the culinary profession, and employment opportunities were influential in trainees' motivations for participating in training (Duman and Durlu Özkaya, 2025). In the same study, the popularity of the culinary profession on television and social media was identified as one of the motivations for participation in training; however, no such finding was encountered in the present study. In a study conducted on students receiving training in the field of food and beverage services at Vocational Training Centers, it is also possible to mention the influence of interest in the profession, the opportunity to open a workplace, and the social environment on motivation to participate in training (Olcaycan, 2018). Similarly, in a study conducted on trainees attending Vocational Training Center courses operating in Istanbul (İSMEK), it was observed that factors such as acquiring an occupation, improving theoretical and practical knowledge and skills, and obtaining a certificate came to the forefront among the main motivational factors for participating in culinary training (Cesur Kalkan, 2024). Similar results were also observed in the study conducted by Birsen and Yavuz (2023). Based on these findings, it can be stated that individuals participating in culinary training share common motivations for attending such training, and that these motivations are shaped by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Eser, 2025).

In participants' evaluations of the training process, views regarding the training environment came to the forefront most prominently. When participants' views were examined in terms of the training environment, the majority stated that the physical space of the kitchen where the training was conducted was insufficient in relation to the number of trainees. Therefore, they indicated that kitchen areas should be expanded or that courses should be conducted with fewer trainees. Similarly, it was stated that the tools and equipment available in the kitchen environment were insufficient both in terms of quality and quantity, and that, due to the number of trainees, tools and equipment had to be used alternately during the training sessions. It can be stated that the common view expressed by the participants applies not only to PEC kitchens, but also to kitchens belonging to different institutions. Indeed, there are numerous studies indicating that kitchen environments in different institutions where culinary training is provided are insufficient in terms of both tools and equipment and physical conditions (Olcaycan, 2018; Özdemir Yaman and Bulduk, 2019). However, some participants stated that they found both the kitchen areas in terms of physical capacity and the tools and equipment available in these kitchen areas to be sufficient. Similarly, in a study conducted on students in the field of food and beverage services receiving training at Vocational Training Centers, it was found that students described the physical space of the kitchen and the availability of tools and equipment as sufficient, partially sufficient, or insufficient, in line with the findings of the present study (Eser, 2025). This situation may be attributed to differences in infrastructure and investment among PEC kitchens across districts. The cost of the ingredients used during training sessions is covered by contributions collected from participants. Similarly, in many culinary training programs offered at formal and non-formal education institutions, kitchen materials are provided by the students themselves (Birsen and Yavuz, 2023). Another evaluation regarding the training environment concerns its social dimension. Participants described the kitchen environment as an enjoyable, pleasant, and socially interactive space. In a study conducted on individuals with work experience in the food and

beverage sector, it was stated that having an enjoyable working environment is an important factor in continuing in the profession (Duman and Durlu Özkaya, 2025). Another influential element in the training environment during the training process was the instructors. Participants referred to the supportive, patient, and guiding characteristics of the instructors responsible for conducting the courses and emphasized the role of instructors in the efficiency of the training process. The constructive and encouraging role of instructors during culinary training has also been identified in numerous studies conducted on this subject (Olcaycan, 2018; Birsen and Yavuz, 2023; Eser, 2025; Duman and Durlu Özkaya, 2025).

Based on participants' views, it is seen that the quality of the training offered at PECs came to the forefront under the headings of technical and theoretical depth, curriculum, and training duration. In the training received, participants were provided with technique- and theory-based instruction on working with recipes, knowledge of measurements and quantities, cutting and cooking techniques, equipment use, hygiene rules, and practical production processes. It was understood that this training proceeded according to a specific curriculum and that recipes suitable for the requirements of the curriculum were shared with the trainees. As a requirement of the training curriculum, it was determined that the criteria for successfully completing the course were not limited only to written and/or practical examinations; elements such as kitchen organization, cleanliness, and work discipline were also taken into consideration by the instructors. Although the training proceeded according to a specific curriculum under the guidance of dedicated instructors, it was observed that course duration was a determining factor for participants in acquiring the desired technical and theoretical skills and knowledge. Indeed, short-term culinary courses were found to be limited in meeting vocational expectations, whereas longer-term courses were evaluated more positively in terms of satisfaction. A similar situation has also been expressed by students attending non-formal education institutions that provide practical culinary training in various provinces of Türkiye. These studies have found that students were satisfied when the courses they attended were long-term, whereas they expressed dissatisfaction when the course duration was short (Olcaycan, 2018; Birsen and Yavuz, 2023; Cesur Kalkan, 2024).

When participants' views on the culinary training offered at PECs were examined, it was seen that the training was considered sufficient by the great majority of participants. In particular, the dominant view was that the training provided the necessary knowledge and experience for acquiring basic culinary skills at the beginner level and for receiving fundamental preparation for the sector. Similar to the findings of the present study, in a study conducted on graduates of PECs in Kastamonu, participants stated that the training offered at PECs was a high-quality education appropriate to the requirements of the age, and that it covered not only culinary practices but also topics such as occupational health and hygiene in detail (Dalahmetoglu, 2024). However, a limited number of participants evaluated the culinary training offered at PECs as either insufficient or partially sufficient. In this regard, participants stated that they did not find the training fully functional in terms of kitchen pace, distance from professional kitchen experience, and advanced areas of specialization.

It is seen that the culinary training offered at PECs provides individuals who successfully complete the course with various vocational and social outcomes. From a vocational perspective, the most frequently emphasized outcome was that individuals improved themselves in terms of theoretical knowledge and technical skills. Participants' views indicate that, during the training, individuals acquired significant knowledge and skills in fundamental areas of cookery, such as cutting and cooking techniques, working with recipes based on measurements and quantities, using tools and equipment, complying with hygiene rules, engaging in practical production processes, and working collaboratively as part of a team. Another vocational outcome was the course completion certificate awarded after the successful completion of the training, which can be viewed through the e-Government system. The fact that graduate trainees hold an official document related to the profession, and that some of them obtain advanced vocational certificates such as master instructor certification through additional training, can be considered an important outcome in terms of vocational identity development (Çetin and Akar Şahingöz, 2019). Indeed, in terms of vocational identity, it was determined that individuals holding such certificates expressed themselves confidently through vocational identities such as cook, pastry cook, or master instructor. Vocational self-confidence and vocational titles enabled graduate trainees to acquire an occupation, become employed in the sector, or be promoted from their current positions to higher positions, thereby allowing them to obtain economic benefits.

Another outcome provided by the training offered at PECs is related to social gains. The certificate awarded as a result of the training makes vocational competence

visible, and the opportunity to work in the sector with a specific occupational title enables participants to act with greater self-confidence, particularly in job interviews and within their social circles. On the other hand, especially for individuals with limited participation in social life, the experience of meeting new people in the course environment, working with them in groups, and establishing new friendships constituted an important example of social outcomes. Studies conducted on trainees and graduates of non-formal education institutions have found that training received in the kitchen environment increases individuals' self-confidence, helps them feel good and happy, contributes to their socialization, positively affects their psychological mood, and also enables them to make new friends and develop their communication skills (Cesur Kalkan, 2024; Eser, 2025; Yahyaoğlu, 2025).

Culinary training received from non-formal education institutions can contribute to the working life of sector employees, and individuals may observe this contribution within their professional lives (Cesur Kalkan, 2024). Indeed, a significant proportion of the participants stated that the practical culinary training offered at PECs was sufficient as a starting point for transition into the sector and that individuals could acquire basic culinary skills through these trainings. Similar to the findings of the present study, a study conducted by Duman and Durlu Özkaya (2025) reported a general tendency to agree that culinary training is sufficient for working in the sector and that the training received is beneficial in an industry-related sense. However, some participants stated that when these trainings are evaluated as a whole, they would not be sufficient on their own, that professional kitchen conditions differ from the course environment, that sectoral production is carried out at an intensive pace and on a large scale, and that there are also areas in the kitchen requiring advanced specialization that cannot be acquired solely through PEC courses. This finding is consistent with the results of a study examining the competence levels of graduates of private culinary schools from the perspective of sector professionals, which stated that educational institutions are successful in providing students with basic skills but remain insufficient in meeting sectoral demands (Enes, 2025). In addition, participants stated that individuals need to make personal effort for vocational development, remain open to continuous training, and have workplace experience.

Culinary training received from non-formal education institutions can contribute to the working life of sector employees, and individuals may observe this contribution within their professional lives (Cesur Kalkan, 2024). Indeed, participants' statements reveal that working with recipes, cutting and cooking techniques, hygiene rules, and product preparation processes learned in the course were also applied in the workplace environment; however, certain differences could also be encountered at specific points. It was stated that the differences between the workplace environment and the practical training environment in the course stemmed from large-scale production, time pressure to complete products, differences in equipment, the presence of kitchen staff who had learned the profession through practice but lacked basic culinary knowledge and skills, and the fact that masters may have their own specific methods. It is possible to encounter many challenges in the professional kitchen environment (Duman and Durlu Özkaya, 2025). Nevertheless, it is known that educational institutions are successful in providing students with basic skills, but remain insufficient in meeting sectoral demands (Enes, 2025).

The majority of participants stated that the official certificate they received after PEC training provided an advantage in job applications, strengthened their CVs, and created trust in the eyes of employers. The certificate obtained after training is considered an important element that makes vocational competence visible for cooks who are already working in the sector and who entered the profession through practice, as well as for graduate trainees who are considering entering the sector for the first time (Çetin and Akar Şahingöz, 2019).

Within the scope of the interviews conducted in the study, participants made numerous recommendations for improving the practical culinary training offered at PECs. Accordingly, participants stated that, in order to improve the training, the physical infrastructure should first be enhanced. They particularly emphasized that the equipment available in the kitchens should be made more similar to the equipment used in professional kitchen environments in the sector, and that missing tools should be supplied in accordance with the number of students. Participants also stated that the number of locations where culinary training is offered at PECs, the number of kitchens, and the physical size of existing kitchens should be increased. This could help address the difficulty of transportation from one location to another, especially in a city with heavy traffic such as Istanbul, and could also enable lessons to be conducted more efficiently in the kitchen environment. Another recommendation expressed by the participants was to increase the duration of existing courses, spread course days across different days of the

week rather than limiting them to certain days, and arrange course schedules according to the needs of both homemakers and working individuals. The demand for extending course and lesson durations indicates that, although participants acquired basic skills in the field in which they received training, they considered longer durations useful for deepening their knowledge and gaining experience. In addition, the distribution of training across various days of the week and the planning of course schedules by taking the participant profile into account indicate the need for longer and more flexible training programs. There are many practical culinary training programs offered at PECs. However, not all of these practical training programs are opened simultaneously at PECs located on the Anatolian Side of Istanbul, and differences arise between districts in terms of the programs offered (HBÖGM, 2025b). On the other hand, when the courses approved to be opened as a whole are examined, it is also noteworthy that there are practical gaps in various branches of applied gastronomy. In this context, participants suggested that, in order to take the practical training offered at PECs to a higher level, new courses and modules related to different types of cuisine and different product groups should be made available to trainees, and long-term training programs should be offered in areas requiring advanced specialization in the sector. This demand for training covers not only practical culinary courses, but also theoretical courses such as kitchen cost calculation. Some participants pointed out that the fact that kitchen materials used in the courses are provided by the trainees themselves creates an economic problem for some individuals, and therefore emphasized the importance of institutional support in the provision of materials. As determined within the scope of the study, participants' purposes for participating in culinary training offered at PECs varied, and the in-class activities and attendance levels of those participating for hobby purposes differed from those participating for vocational development or acquiring an occupation. In this context, in order to increase the efficiency of the training, it is considered appropriate to classify trainees according to their purposes for attending and to reduce the number of trainees in each class. Participants believed that cooperation between PEC administrations and representatives of the food and beverage sector would increase the efficiency of the training. They also considered that practices such as meetings arranged with sector representatives, workplace visits, workshops conducted by expert chefs, and guiding graduates toward job opportunities would produce beneficial outcomes. In a study conducted on individuals receiving training in formal and non-formal education institutions, participants stated that they were dissatisfied with the number of students in the lessons because they attended classes with many people at the same time. They also indicated that institutions should have a specific budget or allowance for consumable materials, that the physical conditions of the kitchen environment and the availability of tools and equipment were insufficient, and that missing materials were supplied by the students themselves. In the same study, it was found that participants made recommendations such as improving the kitchens of the institutions where they received training in terms of both physical space and equipment, allocating an institutional budget for the materials used in training, reducing the number of students in each class, increasing the hours allocated to kitchen practice, organizing cooking competitions and workshops, and providing support for internships or transition to employment after training (Birsen and Yavuz, 2023). These problems are not limited to non-formal education institutions, but also apply to departments in higher education institutions that include culinary courses, and the proposed solutions are parallel to the findings of the present study (Arıkan et al., 2018; Yılmaz et al., 2023).

The theoretical and practical culinary training provided by PECs creates an important foundation that facilitates trainees' employment in the food and beverage sector. Although these courses provide candidates with basic vocational knowledge and skills related to professional kitchens, the competencies acquired are generally sufficient for entry-level positions located at the lower levels of the kitchen hierarchy, thereby enabling individuals to gain employment in the sector. In this respect, PEC training functions as a form of preparatory support for individuals who are completely inexperienced or have only limited experience in transitioning into working life. The official training certificate awarded upon successful completion of the program strengthens the trainee's sector-specific CV and allows them to demonstrate their vocational competence during job interviews not only through verbal statements but also through an official document. In this sense, the certificate serves as tangible evidence validating the trainee's qualifications, while also increasing the individual's credibility in the eyes of employers and providing an advantage during recruitment processes. This, in turn, enables individuals to feel more secure during job interviews and to express themselves with greater self-confidence. The advantages provided by PEC training in terms of employment are also relevant

for individuals who are already working in other sectors but wish to change their current field of employment and move into a new career area. In this respect, PEC training supports not only first-time entry into working life but also career transition. Furthermore, the contribution of PEC training to employment is not limited to facilitating access to a job in an existing enterprise. The knowledge and skills acquired during the training process also provide a substantial foundation for individuals who wish to establish their own businesses or begin small-scale food production activities. Accordingly, trainees who successfully complete the program may choose to lay the foundations of independent vocational initiatives through which they can generate income, rather than seeking employment in an existing business.

The training provided by PECs offers basic preparation that facilitates workplace adaptation, particularly for individuals who are new to the food and beverage sector and have not yet gained professional experience. During the training process, participants acquire entry-level knowledge and skills required in professional kitchens, including working in accordance with recipes, basic cutting and cooking techniques, hygiene rules, food preparation processes, and the use of kitchen equipment. These competencies help individuals perform basic workplace duties more consciously, understand kitchen organization, and adapt to professional expectations within a shorter period of time. However, the training offered by PECs cannot always fully reflect all the conditions encountered in professional kitchens. Large-scale production, differences in equipment, high work intensity, the need to prepare food for large numbers of people simultaneously, and the advanced expertise required in certain kitchen sections may make it difficult to transfer the knowledge and skills acquired during training directly to the workplace. Therefore, although PEC training provides an important foundation for workplace adaptation, it may not offer sufficiently comprehensive vocational competence to support adaptation across all areas of a professional kitchen. Continuity of training is also a determining factor in strengthening workplace adaptation. Participation in additional courses after basic training, the acquisition of new certificates and qualifications, and the development of knowledge and skills in different production areas may enable individuals to become more functional and versatile kitchen employees. In this way, adaptation can move beyond a short-term process limited to the initial employment period and become a continuing learning process that develops alongside professional growth. Participants' continued theoretical and practical development after training facilitates their adaptation to workplace duties and responsibilities by improving their vocational qualifications. Over time, assuming greater responsibility, advancing within the kitchen hierarchy, and receiving promotions may increase both workplace adaptation and professional motivation. The increase in economic earnings associated with promotion may also be considered an important factor that strengthens individuals' willingness to remain in the workplace and their adjustment to the working environment. Nevertheless, certain organizational and cultural characteristics of professional kitchens may complicate the workplace adaptation process. In particular, experienced master chefs may have their own distinctive working methods, some kitchen employees may have learned the profession primarily through traditional master–apprentice relationships rather than formal or non-formal education, and workplace practices may differ from the methods taught during training. These differences may cause PEC graduates to experience difficulties during the initial stages of workplace adaptation.

The training provided by PECs contributes not only to individuals' acquisition of vocational knowledge and skills but also to their ability to define themselves as members of a particular profession. Occupational titles such as assistant cook, cook, or similar designations stated on the certificates awarded upon completion of training make individuals' qualifications formally visible. Thus, participants are able to express their occupational status not only through experience or verbal claims but also through a recognized document. However, vocational identity development is not a process that ends with the completion of a single training program. Continuing education and obtaining more advanced qualifications, such as master instructor certificate, enable individuals to strengthen and diversify their vocational identities over time. In particular, certificates obtained in different areas of specialization make it easier for individuals to demonstrate that they possess specific occupational competencies and to position themselves as more qualified employees in the relevant field. This also helps them express their profession with greater self-confidence both in the workplace and in social settings. PEC training also serves an important function for individuals who have worked in the sector for many years but have been unable to document their knowledge and experience through an official qualification. Individuals who have acquired professional experience through master–apprentice relationships or workplace learning are given the

opportunity to formally document their existing competencies through training and certification. In this way, previously invisible occupational experience gains formal recognition, allowing individuals to demonstrate their membership in the profession and thereby strengthening their vocational identity. The theoretical and practical knowledge and skills acquired through training also play a significant role in vocational identity development. Learning the principles underlying professional practices in the kitchen, understanding why particular tasks are performed in specific ways, and being able to explain these practices verbally help individuals see themselves not merely as people performing kitchen duties but as qualified professionals possessing a defined body of knowledge and skills. Assuming greater responsibility after training, receiving promotions, and advancing to higher positions within the kitchen hierarchy are also among the factors that reinforce vocational identity. Progression from assistant cook to cook or to more senior positions represents an important indication that an individual's professional competence has been recognized and accepted within the workplace. The training environment and instructors' attitudes also play an important role in the formation and development of vocational identity. Supportive, encouraging, and constructive attitudes toward trainees may prevent mistakes made during the learning process from negatively affecting individuals' self-confidence and perceptions of the profession. Treating mistakes not as signs of failure but as a natural part of learning strengthens trainees' sense of belonging to the profession and helps them perceive themselves as professionally valuable and competent.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that culinary training provided by PECs is not limited to the acquisition of technical knowledge and skills; rather, it serves a multidimensional function by simultaneously supporting individuals' entry into the food and beverage sector, workplace adaptation, and vocational identity development. The basic vocational competencies acquired during training, together with their formal certification, enhance the employability of individuals who have no prior experience or who wish to transition from another sector. However, considering the high production volume, intense work pace, diversity of equipment, and specialized task structure of professional kitchens, basic training alone appears insufficient to ensure full and sustainable workplace adaptation. Gaining on-the-job experience, continuing with advanced training, and gradually assuming greater professional responsibility are therefore critical to strengthening adaptation. In addition, certification, the formal recognition of prior experience, promotion, and acceptance within the professional community contribute to vocational identity development by enabling individuals to define themselves as members of the profession. In terms of practical implications, stronger collaboration is recommended between PECs and restaurants, hotels, catering companies, pastry shops, and institutional foodservice establishments. Training content should be updated regularly in line with current industry expectations, and trainees should be provided with internship, workplace observation, mentoring, and transition-to-employment support that enables them to experience professional kitchen conditions. Furthermore, supplementing basic culinary training with advanced modules may contribute to trainees' specialization and continued professional development. Strengthening training kitchens in terms of tools, utensils, and equipment so that they more closely resemble professional workplaces may also facilitate graduates' adaptation to the sector. In addition, organizing activities such as career days that bring trainees and graduates together with employers may make the transition from PEC training to employment more systematic and sustainable.

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Competing Interest

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Ethics Statement

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of İstanbul Gedik University (approval date: May 4, 2026; reference no.: E-25155520-050.04-2026.173337.75). Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and participant anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study.

Data Availability Statement

Data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

AI statement

Generative AI tools were used only in a limited and controlled manner for language editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the authors.

Author Contributions

B.B. Taştekin: *Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft.*

B. Yalınkılıç: *Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Project administration, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.*

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