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## “Let me have a seat and see what's going on in this class”: Perspectives of Early Childhood Teachers about Parental Confrontation

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Interpersonal relations are identified as affiliation and connections between teachers and parents in the context of education. Although the number of studies on the nature of interpersonal relations between these two counterparts have increased in recent years, the studies conducted about confrontational situations, especially in the early childhood educational context, are scarce. Whereas confrontational behaviors, which are intense and unexpected, may set barriers for a strong and quality parent-teacher dyad. Within this context, this study explored how early childhood teachers perceive the confrontational behaviors of parents. Interpretive phenomenological approach draws upon data from twelve semi-structured interviews. The data acquired from the participants was subjected to thematic analysis using MAXQDA. The analysis revealed three main themes regarding teachers' perceptions of parental confrontation: deprecation for early childhood education, incongruity of the parents' actions and the modus operandi of the school, and parental violence against teachers. Indeed, the participants reported a wide-ranging confrontational behaviors of parents varying from the self-ordained to violent behaviors. The participants stated that they felt being frustrated, blamed and manipulated by parents. Although the presence of both psychological and physical violence was mentioned in the interviews, psychological violence like insulting, mocking, and deliberate insolence was more prevalent. In conclusion, this study revealed a need for the construction of professionalism in early childhood education settings within the societal perspective.

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## **Introduction**

In the educational context, the interpersonal relationship includes different clusters of dyads ranging from teachers-principals to teachers-parents. The quality of all interpersonal relationships in education is fundamental for students' development (Wubbels, Brekermans, den Brok, & van Tartwijk 2006). One of the critical interpersonal relationships is established between the families and the teachers. Indeed, it is accepted as a precondition for a successful teaching process (Opić, 2016) because this relationship constructs a productive learning environment and solves the problematic situations in classrooms (Zandvliet, den Brok, Mainhard, & van Tartwijk, 2014). Besides, positive interpersonal relationships between teachers and parents have numerous positive effects on children, such as emotional support, academic success, and social development (Martin, 2014). However, the nature of the interpersonal relationship between teachers and parents is not the same for all stakeholders. This interpersonal relationship may not always positively occur because an efficient interpersonal relationship depends on various individual differences of the counterparts. Interpersonal skills (Petani & Krajinovic, 2019), personality characteristics (Papworth, Martin, Ginns, Liem, & Hawkes, 2012), demographic features (Petani & Krajinovic, 2019), perceptions, values, and attitudes (Elsayed-Elkhouly, 1996) play an instrumental role in this process. These different features of counterparts might result in confrontational situations between teachers and parents.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) frames the nature of parent-teacher relationships in Ecological Systems Theory. As stated by Bronfenbrenner, the parent-teacher dyad involves two microsystems as their homes and schools. It constitutes a mesosystem in which children can learn and develop through connections. In microsystems, each person has unique activities, roles, and interpersonal relations with the developing child (Shelton, 2019). Therefore, both parents and teachers bring different roles, expectations, and activities into the children's mesosystem. The connection between these different microsystems may be provided through the “intersetting communication” between home and school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 210). Intersetting communication is used to describe a type of communication, including messages that members of a setting wish to transmit to members of another setting to provide specific information (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This type of communication is critical for construction of cooperation and knowledge-sharing process among teachers and parents.

In early childhood education (ECE), a mesosystem can take many forms such as parents' involvement, engagement in school processes, and in/formal communication between home and school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within this aspect, parents can engage, not just involve, in the education process by exchanging information and working as a team member to reach common goals for the sake of preschool children. However, Bronfenbrenner stated that when one level of the ecological system does not cooperate as a system, children's development is negatively affected (Benjamin, 2015). In other words, the dissociation between the school and home influences microsystems and mesosystems. Therefore, it is essential to have cooperation between parents and teachers through reciprocal and efficient communication (Knopf & Swick, 2008) because a mesosystem contributes to a child's development only when they are supportive of each other (Shelton, 2019). However, sometimes dissonance between counterparts can result in confrontational behaviors perceived by teachers and parents.

According to Park, Ickes, and Robinson (2014), confrontational behaviors are “intense, unpleasant, and often unexpected” (p.26). Although a collaboration between parents and teachers is desired in preschool settings, both counterparts might sometimes demonstrate



confrontational behaviors. These behaviors bear the potential to grow into physical or verbal aggression (Park et al., 2014) and damage interpersonal relationships between parents and teachers. In the present study, the perspectives of teachers toward confrontational behaviors of parents were examined.

Considering the literature, it can be concluded that teachers' perceptions of parents' confrontational behaviors can be a worldwide phenomenon that needs to be addressed in studies. Teachers may report some actions of parents as confrontational (Wolf, 2020; Lasater, 2016; van der Wolf & Beukering, 2011). For instance, parents' reluctance to involve in the process (Cisneros-Chernour, Cisneros, & Moreno, 2000; Sverdlov & Aram, 2016), their perception of preschool as a playground and preschool teachers as caregivers (Zembar, 2012), their lack of understanding about preschool curriculum (Lau & Ng, 2019) and questioning as well as criticizing preschool teachers' professionalism (Saçkes, 2013; Zembar, 2012) were reported as challenging or confrontational behaviors counter to preschool teachers.

In this respect, Appelbaum (2009) provides a guide for teachers toward difficult parents described as hard-to-handle. According to this guide, there are five parent behaviors making teachers lose their temper: parents might a) make teachers feel guilty about their professionalism, b) make teachers feel sorry about themselves, c) rush, or d) manipulate teachers during decision-making process, and e) make teachers feel anxious, frustrated, negative and upset as a result of their confrontational behaviors. Although Appelbaum denominates these behaviors as hard-to-handle parents' behaviors, the present study approaches these behaviors of parents as confrontational behaviors as the term "hard-to-handle" implies preschool teachers' lack of coping skills and labels parents. On the other hand, the term of confrontational behaviors focuses on behaviors rather than labelling parents' actions related to interpersonal relations between teachers and parents.

The significance of the present study is twofold. Firstly, the parent involvement in the early years constitutes a mesosystem for the developing child. Hence, confrontational behaviors can damage this mesosystem by harming the interpersonal relationships between two sides. When the positive effects of parent involvement process in the aspects of teachers, parents, and children are considered, it is critical to reveal teachers' perceptions of parents' confrontational behaviors to strengthen the connection between counterparts and put forth practical implications. Secondly, although some studies are supporting the idea that teachers might perceive behaviors of parents as confrontational or difficult (Prakke, van Peet, & van der Wolf, 2007; Wyness, 2019; Pepe & Addimando, 2014), these studies focus on general perceptions of teachers on parents in different contexts rather than early childhood years. Therefore, additional studies are needed to understand how early childhood teachers perceive confrontational situations. In this context, the purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of early childhood teachers on confrontational behaviors of parents. In line with the aim of the study, the following research question was examined:

- (1) How do early childhood teachers make sense of confrontational behaviors of parents?

## **Method**

As a qualitative research method, the phenomenological design was preferred in this study because it is useful in explaining a phenomenon through the essence of the participants' experiences regarding the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological studies have different types like descriptive, hermeneutic, transcendental, and others. (Creswell, 2013). In this study, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was utilized. Smith,

Flowers, and Larkin (2009) stated that IPA aims to explore how participants perceive or understand a particular phenomenon they experienced in a specific context. In parallel, this study was concerned with understanding the confrontational parent behaviors perceived by early childhood teachers in the Turkish context. The confrontational parent behaviors perceived by early childhood teachers correspond to the phenomenon of this study.

### **Participants**

The participants were all volunteers and selected through convenience and criterion sampling method. According to Creswell (2013), the convenience sampling method saves time, money, and effort. The sample who reached out via convenience method is also considered whether they experienced the current study's phenomenon as the criterion. Indeed, all of the teachers that we conveniently got in touch with reported confrontational experiences with parents. After using both the convenience and criterion method, the quality of assurance is provided (Creswell, 2013). As Creswell (2013) reported, his analyses revealed that the sample size in phenomenological studies might range from 1 to 325. As well, Dukes (1984) claims that theoretically, one sample is enough for conducting phenomenological research. He also claims that the researchers might have problems differentiating between what they expect to see and what they see. That is why, Dukes (1984) offers to have three to ten subjects in a phenomenological study. In the current study, to overcome any perception bias, 12 in-service preschool teachers, who were met by the researchers for the first time, were reached out (See Table 1). To increase the accuracy and honesty of their responses, the study's aim and the nature were explained to the participants clearly (Brink, 1993).

All participants were female. The participants' teaching experiences range from one to 32 years and working years at their current schools range from one to 22 years. While the question regarding taking any course related to parent involvement during pre-service training years was not applicable for one participant as she did not hold a Bachelor's degree, 41 % of participants did not take any course and 50 % of them took the course. When the participants' in-service training related to parent involvement was considered, 83 % of them did not take any training about the parent involvement.

**Table 1.** Teaching experiences of teachers

<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>Work Year at the Current School</b>	<b>Pre-Service Training</b>	<b>In-Service Training</b>
T1	24	7	No	No
T2	10	9	No	No
T3	3	2	Yes	No
T4	14	6	No	No
T5	7	4	Yes	No
T6	32	22	No	No
T7	7	4	No	Yes
T8	1	1	Yes	No
T9	4	4	Yes	No
T10	7	5	Yes	Yes
T11	8	4	Not applicable	No
T12	4	1	Yes	No

### **Data collection instruments and procedure**

Ethics committee approval was acquired from a university. Demographic information questionnaire and semi-structured interview protocol were utilized to collect data from the



participants. Firstly, a demographic information questionnaire was conducted to gather information about teachers' gender, years of experience, and whether they took a parent involvement related course or not. Afterward, the semi-structured interview protocol developed by researchers was applied to gather data from in-service ECE teachers. The interview questions were formed by reviewing the literature and considering the aim of the study. The questions were piloted with six participants, who are different individuals from the main study participants. According to the feedback acquired from the pilot study, the questions were revised by the researchers.

There were five main questions in the interview form. For the present study, the data from the first three questions were analyzed and reported. The main data was collected through individual interviews lasting approximately 30 – 40 minutes and recorded by using an audio-recording device. The interviews were conducted in different methods. In detail, two interviews were conducted through the telephone; one interview was conducted via online conference; nine interviews were collected face to face in different locations such as inside classroom, different place at school, outside of the school. The locations of data collection were chosen based on the suitability for the participants. Also, specific attention was given to the minimum interruption by the third parties during the interview. To ensure confidentiality, the names of the participants were kept anonymous. The questions in the interview form were stated below:

- (2) Have you ever felt in a difficult situation against a parent? Can you give us an example?
- (3) Have you encountered a parent behavior that made you feel bad, like mocking, threatening, showing aggression, physical attack, etc.?
- (4) Do you think there exists a difficult parent for a teacher? How would you describe difficult parents? What features do difficult parents have?

### ***Data analysis procedure***

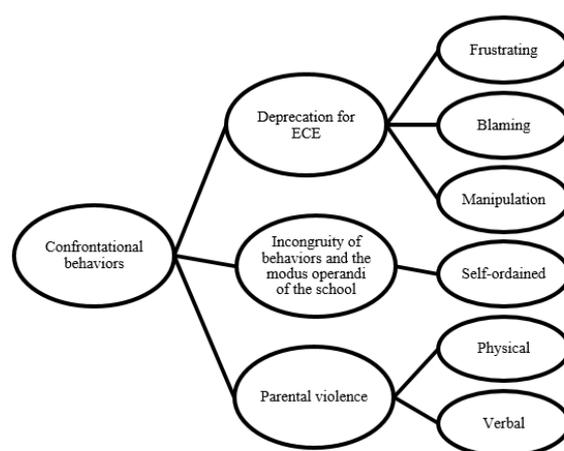
Following the researchers' transcriptions of the audio records, a hybrid approach to thematic analysis in qualitative research was utilized to analyze the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) described the thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and report patterns and themes within the data. The hybrid approach incorporated both the initial deductive and a second inductive phase (Swain, 2018). At the first phase, deductive coding was performed by considering Appelbaum's framework (2009, pp. 47). At the second phase of the analysis, inductive coding was performed iteratively, and all data were analyzed, and additional codes and sub-codes were added to the framework of parental confrontational behaviors. Then, coded data were reviewed to identify similarities and overlap between codes to generate data themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Three themes that were aggregated by six codes have emerged. As illustrated in Figure 1, the themes were a) perceived deprecation for early childhood, b) incongruity of parent's behaviors and the modus operandi of the school, and c) parental violence. MAXQDA 2020 (VERBI Software, 2019) was used for data analysis.

Ensuring confirmability, dependability, credibility, and transferability of qualitative studies are critical steps to provide trustworthiness for the study (Seymour, 2012). In terms of confirmability, methods, and data collection and analysis procedures were clearly defined. Related data clearly exemplified the findings. For dependability, the research question was stated explicitly. Data quality was ensured through the intercoder agreement as well. During the data analyses, investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1978) was applied by the three authors

who specialized in parent-school partnership in early childhood education to review the findings and control the accuracy of the codes and themes. To represent credibility of the research, findings were clearly explained without any uncertainty, and the data were linked with the prior theory, i.e., Appelbaum’s framework. Finally, original sample characteristics were described in detail to ensure transferability.

## Results

The analysis revealed three overarching themes regarding the participants’ perceptions of parental confrontational behaviors (See Figure 1). Among the confrontational behaviors indicated by Appelbaum (2009), three of them, i.e. frustrating, blaming, and manipulation, were reported in this study by the participants. However, parents’ behaviors that intend to make teachers feel guilty and rush them did not emerge. Confrontational behaviors within the Appelbaum's (2009) framework were stated by the participants in relation to the first theme, named deprecation for ECE, created in the second cycle coding. Below each theme was described in detail.



**Figure 1.** Parents confrontational behaviors perceived by teachers

### ***Perceived deprecation of early childhood teaching profession***

The majority of the participants reported parental behaviors that deprecate the early childhood profession. They perceived confrontation when parents underestimate the value of their profession. Specifically, the participants reported that parents’ deprecation of the profession resonate in their confrontational behaviors that frustrate, manipulate, or blame teachers. The perceptions of the participants are described below.

#### *Feeling frustration, or inferiority*

Many interviewees reported feeling frustration or inferiority when they came across confrontational situations. Most of the incidences they discussed were related to how they felt underestimating their profession or their roles as experts. To illustrate, T3 explained the issue as follows:

*“In the neighborhood of the school I work in, the importance given to early childhood education is low. The work of the preschool teacher is perceived as unnecessary. Similarly, it was not in an insulting way, but I have come across sentences like ‘what do you do in the class anyway?’”*

Also, T5 defined confrontational parents as “*the ones perceiving the teacher as a babysitter.*”, and she stressed the frequency of such perceptions as “... we [refers ECE teachers] *encounter the situation as perceiving the school as a nursery or a playground a lot.*” On the other hand, T12 asserted that the ‘babysitter perception’ might provoke a feeling of inferiority among teachers:

*“Might be like disdain. Regarded not like a teacher or an educator, but being perceived like a babysitter. Instead of getting information about the child's education, obsessing over small things and making a big deal make you feel uncomfortable and bad. They make you feel inferior.”*

In addition to the underestimation for the profession, the interviewees mentioned their frustration after being criticized for their educational strategy by the parents, as illustrated by T9:

*“One of my students and his friend were not sleeping on their cushions at nap time. Because of this situation, I applied a sanction [she stated that the children asked for taking their blankets. But, she did not allow children to take them while sleeping since they did not take them in the time they should have. After a while, she told children to have their blankets, but they refused to have]. After that, the parent spoke to me and asked how I thought the punishment was right to be given to her child. The parent said children would get cold if they sleep without blankets. I realized that the parent didn't like my educational strategy and she seemed like judging me. ... As someone in this business, I felt sad that my educational strategy has been criticized in this way. ... Professional status of a teacher is important.”*

### *Blaming*

Most of the interviewees perceived parents’ tendency to blame them for their certain educational strategies. Some interviewees defined such confrontational behaviors as neither trustful, supportive, nor respectful for their professional position. They based the blaming tendency on parents’ overprotective attitudes towards their child. T7 explained the issue as follows:

*“Sometimes, parents don't support the teacher. Sometimes they can oppose the teacher. They want to believe in their child. They want to trust their child. They react to the teacher somehow. They say that their child is more precious.” (T7)*

It can be inferred from the teachers’ reports that the parent’s overprotective attitudes might sometimes turn out to be abusive behaviors targeting the teacher or another child in the class. To illustrate, T1 reported a parent’s attempt at physical and verbal abuse after the parent heard about a conflict between her child and a friend. As explained by T1 and T4, the teachers perceived the parental blame for taking the side of the other child instead of protecting her own:

*“... There was a disagreement between two children. A parent came directly and attacked the child with whom her child had disagreement in front of me. She almost beat the child. [The parent was] Yelling, yelling, and yelling. This time I intervened. Then, I experienced confrontation with her.” (T1)*

*“When the children in the classroom hit each other, one of the parents not only maltreated (verbally) the friend who hit her child but verbally criticized and tried to scold the child. When I intervened, the parent turned on me. S/he was like, ‘Then, you should have prevented it!’. I received the parents' accusation while trying to explain*

*that children can treat each other in this way because this is an age-related process.”*  
(T4)

Moreover, some of the interviewees perceived confrontation with parents when they tended to reject their child's unique needs like T6 as *"We were talking about the child's intelligence and age. We told the parent, 'Would you take your child to a psychologist?' The parent started [aggressively] telling that 'You are sending us to a psychologist as if my child was insane!! ..."*. They asserted that sometimes teachers receive parental blame for causing children's behaviors/conditions that make the teacher suspicious about their unique needs. T3 exemplified the particular parent behaviors as follows:

*"I could not establish a dialogue with one of my students. I could not interact, communicate in any way. I couldn't even have eye contact. I started to think that she is with special needs... we had a parent interview... I talked about my professional observations about the child, but the parent refused them by saying, 'That is not true, it's never like that at home, I don't know why it happens like this at school.' She meant that my actions in the class resulted in the behaviors I observed. She implied that I was doing something bad to the child at school, so the child was quiet, refusing school, and refusing to speak."*

### *Manipulation*

Most of the interviewees perceived parental confrontation, such as parents' tendency to manipulate the teachers' actions or decisions. They felt that parents ignore the expertise of the teacher. For example, T8 described the difficult parent as *"The parent who forgets that the teacher is an educator and tries to get what he wants"*.

They linked the confrontational parent behaviors with the parents' 'child-focused' beliefs. T11 described it as follows: *"if the parent wants everything centered around his/her child, I think s/he is difficult."*. It could be inferred from the participants' reports that teachers might perceive manipulative confrontation if parents express how they think the teacher should treat their child and express overloading demands from the teacher. T7 explained the result as following:

*"... The parents say 'No, my teacher, my child is more precious [compared to other children]. They sometimes say that you should be able to provide for my child's needs in any case..."*

Some interviewees reported parents' manipulative behaviors related to the class's decisions that parents did not approve. Teachers felt that these parents acted as if they knew better than the teachers and tried to tell teachers how to perform their job. T8 exemplified the situation as follows (see also T9 in the frustration section):

*"T8: One of the children complained about his desk mate at home. The parent told me 'there is a situation, bla bla bla, this is the case. I do not want my child to sit next to him.'*

*Interviewer: The parents could directly interfere in the classroom related issues, right?*

*T8: Yes, exactly."*

### *Perceived incongruity of parents' actions and the modus operandi of the school*

Some interviewees reported that it might be difficult to handle an incongruity of parents' actions and the school rules. It can be implied that teachers perceived parents as self-



ordained while involving in their children's education. The participants perceived that the self-ordained behaviors, like entering the class without permission (T5), calling the teacher even in the middle of an activity (T8), and intervening in incidents that happened in the class without considering the teacher's authority (T1), which might damage the professional atmosphere of the schools. T8 explained the issue as follows:

*“Interviewer: Have you ever felt in a difficult situation against a parent?”*

*T8: Yes, for example, ... the parents sometimes called me up.*

*Interviewer: Were they allowed to call you up at any time or at just the school hours?*

*T8: Yes, at any time but in school hours. They could call me from 8.00 AM to 5.30 PM, even if I am in the class.*

*Interviewer: Are you informed from the call previously?*

*T8: They are calling the secretarial, and she immediately transfers the parent's call to me. ... Our activities are interrupted.”*

An interviewee stated a snowball effect in the class that was started when a parent did not act following the teacher's rules. Indeed, T1 presented that self-ordained behaviors were transmitted from a parent to another who did not have before:

*“... [talks about a child who started the school after the orientation week of the class and the child's parent (P1) allowed to stay in the class for two/three days with her child]. I had two or three more mothers, mothers of the crying children, with me in the classroom. We had an energetic and vigilant girl. I was observing her [talk about a problem behavior of the child]. Before I intervened with the child, P1 interfered in the situation. I warned the parent. I told her 'do not interfere, I saw the girl and I was here'. I warned the parent several times. On the third day, I took the parents out of the classroom to refrain from the case to happen again. I told her that even if the child cries, she has to stay in the class. I don't know whatever she (P1) said to the energetic girl's mother (P2) while she was waiting outside. When I went to the school the following day, the mother of that girl (P2) was also sitting in the classroom. I told her that the other children cry in the classroom, so they are here, but yours doesn't cry, so why are you here? She said: 'Let me have a seat and see what's going on in this class. That woman (P1) complained about my girl.' Then, I explained the situation to that parent (P2), but the parent was persistently looking into my eyes and was acting the same.”*

### **Perceived Parental Violence**

Some interviewees reported violence perpetrated by parents against themselves. Although participants asserted both psychological and physical violence, they majorly referred to psychological violence. Psychological violence reported by teachers involved insulting, mocking, inappropriate comments, and deliberate insolence. To illustrate, T10 stated her perceived mocking and insulting by parents as *“There were parents mocking me. There were such parents who disdained me by making fun, of course.”* Also, T8 reported inappropriate comments as *“One of the parents of the next class ... told me that, she had goosebumps when she saw me.”* On the other hand, the physical violence reported in the interviews was not directly intended to harm the teacher. Instead, T2 exemplified a parent who lost her self-control in anger and damaged a physical property of the class as follows:

*“Generally, my confrontational situations are always about financial issues [the teacher talks about the cases when she needs to collect money from parents for monthly fees or for conducting extracurricular activities like visiting a museum, going to the theatre and alike.]. Apart from that, I have not been in a complicated situation*

*with the parents until now. Always financially, because of objections... So again, in a financial situation, one of the parents head-butted to the door while asking for money. He broke the door, in front of children, in front of other parents!”*

## **Discussion**

Following the ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the current study aimed to explore early childhood teachers' perspectives regarding confrontational parent-teacher interaction within the mesosystem. The findings asserted crucial insights for interpersonal relationships between parents and teachers concerning the confrontational situations that show deficiencies in the mesosystem.

Teachers' perceptions on parental confrontation indicated different patterns for the complexity of the parent-teacher collaboration. The participants reported a wide range of confrontational behaviors ranging from entering the class without permission to violence. The results might be interpreted from theoretical, practical, and methodological viewpoints. Theoretically, the findings supported that confrontation is “*in the eye of the beholder*” (Egan, 1976, p.173). That is, parental confrontation is a mechanism that transacts within the teachers' feelings or perceptions. It is not directly related to the anatomy of the confrontational behaviors. Although the data does not reflect the parents' side, it can be implied that teachers may feel confrontation even if it is not the intention of parents. Thus, the study challenges Appelbaum's teacher guide that describes confrontational parent behaviors and lists handling strategies. Since the key for confrontational situations at schools may be in the idiosyncratic interpretations of the counterparts (Egan, 1976; Park, Mathieu, & Grosser, 2020), practical teacher guides that describe confrontational parent behaviors are unlikely to be effective for teachers. Rather, teachers might benefit from the guides that stress the complex nature of interpersonal relations and interpersonal skills of teachers.

The complex and idiosyncratic nature of confrontation in schools brings questions to the methodological approaches in confrontation studies. Both quantitative (e.g. May, Chen, Johnson, Hutchinson, & Ricketts, 2010) and qualitative (e.g. Zembat, 2012) studies investigating confrontation in schools exist in the literature. Park et al. (2020), studying team members' conflict in organizations, suggested that interpersonal conflicts are complex and aggregated statistical indices (i.e., variance, mean) fail to indicate the complexity of the concept rigorously. Supporting the idea, the large spectrum of teachers' perceptions on confrontation points out the necessity of qualitative approaches investigating confrontation in schools to honor the complexity of the perceptions and the interpersonal relations. Further studies should investigate confrontation in schools qualitatively.

Although the data supported that one size does not fit all for the teachers' viewpoints (Egan, 1976; Park et al., 2020), it seems that the participants' recounting of confrontational behaviors was preponderantly charged with the feeling of deprecation for the early childhood profession. Looking at the literature, it can be assumed that parents' lack of knowledge about ECE (Mahmood, 2013), degrading perceptions for either the ECE (Cisneros-Chernour et al., 2000) or the teacher (Zembat, 2012; Appelbaum, 2009; Murray, 2000) are global. Since teachers might perceive professionalism as a key factor in their educator identities (Landeros, 2011), the degrading attitudes regarding their professionalism are more likely for them to be perceived as confrontational. Supporting the idea Zhang and Yu (2017) found that babysitting perceptions were strongly disagreed by the early childhood teachers. They claimed their role identity as teachers by attributing the value of their job.



On the other hand, scholars (S. Guo & Pungur, 2008; Y. Guo, Wu, & Liu, 2019; Zuoyu, 2002) echoed that the value and social status of teaching profession in society have been deteriorated, which is reflected in the perceptions of early childhood teachers (Mahmood, 2013). Beyond teachers' perceptions, the current study findings also indicate the reflections of the societal perception regarding early childhood profession. Teachers' experiences of parents' negative attitudes toward their expertise area propose the devaluation of early childhood profession. Since our findings indicated problematic interpersonal relations among teachers and parents because of the deterioration in the value of the field, we support the invitations of S. Guo and Pungur (2008), Y. Guo et al., (2019), and Zuoyu (2002) that there is a need for construction of professionalism within the societal perspective in Turkey, as well.

In the current data, perceived confrontation against the teachers' professionalism was linked to three of the confrontational behaviors specified by Appelbaum (2009), which are frustrating, blaming, and manipulation. According to the findings, when the teachers feel frustrated, blamed, and manipulated, they may perceive deprecation for the early childhood field. Contributing to Appelbaum's (2009) framework, it is reasonable to indicate that perceived underestimation for early childhood might be an underlying mechanism for the teachers' feelings of frustration and blame and manipulation of parents.

The current study revealed that early childhood teachers might experience confrontational situations when parents try to intervene in the teachers' decisions and educational strategies in the class. The finding was in line with Hedlin (2019) findings, who claims preschool teachers were exposed to a wide variety of demands from the parents telling teachers how to perform their work. The participants in the current study connected most of the parents' manipulative attitudes to their overprotective and intense focus on their children. The issue is not about whether teachers perceive this kind of parents as excessively worried (Prakke et al., 2007) or overprotective preschool parents (Çakmak, Neslitürk, & Asar, 2014; Seligman, 2000), but the issue lies within the differentiating roles of the stakeholders. This finding supports Hedlin's (2019) discussion regarding parents' particularistic relation with their children and teachers' universalistic relation with all children in the class. Although parents might fail to realize other children's needs and interests, teachers have to pay attention to many children at the same time by considering the individual needs of each child. In this sense, there exists a possible role confusion of the confrontational counterparts within their interpersonal relations. Based on the participants' declarations, it can be interpreted that teachers perceived parents' interventions in their decisions as confrontational because the teachers perceive themselves as an authority figure for the parents and the class.

In this context, parent engagement discourse described by Pushor & Ruitenberg (2005); Pushor (2007) and Mckenna and Millen (2013) may be examined. Parent engagement can be established when parent knowledge and teacher knowledge fit together and when power and authority are shared by the two counterparts (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005; Pushor, 2007). Likewise, parent voice and parent presence create parent engagement (Mckenna & Millen 2013). Both definitions claim mutual and shared responsibilities of teachers and parents by which separate roles as parents and educators can be practiced in harmony. Parents' expertise on their children (Mckenna & Millen, 2013) and teachers' expertise on education field should nourish each other to establish desired interpersonal relations within the engagement discourse. However, the harmony should be built upon positive recognition of the counterparts for each other's roles and places in the context. Otherwise, the interpersonal relations among teachers and parents might be affected negatively (Landeros, 2011). Apparently, the teacher mentioned above perspectives and experiences within the data

indicate serious impairments in the process of parent engagement.

Supporting Zembat (2012) findings, the participant teachers perceived the situation as confrontational when parents behave against the school rules. They had experiences with parents who were not sensitive to the classroom norms. This might be again related to the parents' school-related perspectives. Once parents have devalued the program of the education and teacher responsibilities in the class, they might tend to ignore the rules, which is a hypothesized relation that should be investigated in further studies. Moreover, the participant teachers clarified that these behaviors had influenced the climate of the classroom and their interpersonal relations with other parents. The finding supports Mckenna and Millen (2013), who stated that parent engagement is a collaborative process and simple teacher-parent-child interactions are not enough to explain the school climate in terms of engagement. In the example of the current data, confrontation with a parent can be transferred to another parent in the class since classroom is a community in which its members interact with each other regularly so that they can be affected by other parents.

Arguably, the most salient finding of the current study is related to parental violence towards teachers. Although the scholars have echoed challenging perceptions of parents who underestimate the ECE profession in the literature repeatedly, the current study shed light on an invisible part of the iceberg. The interviewees reported several instances in which they were the victims of parental aggression. In a similar vein, Campbell (2011) reported the increase in parental violence in schools toward the school staff. May et al. (2010), and Reddy et al. (2013) underlined that teachers encounter physical and verbal parental victimization. They criticized the lack of studies addressing parental aggression or victimization toward teachers. They announced the need to investigate the topic to prevent teachers from job-related demoralizations (May et al., 2010; Reddy et al., 2013) such as losing job satisfaction (Prakke et al., 2007). Following their call, a few studies have discussed teachers experiences of parental aggression (e.g. Mahmood, 2013). Supporting the findings of (May et al., 2010) and Mahmood (2013), the current study participants expressed they were victimized physically and verbally by the parents. The victimization attempts are goal-oriented, and they dictate a position of power (Olweus, 2013). There is a possibility that the parents may try to exploit a powerful place to seek what they think the best for their child. As discussed before, the situation will definitely distort the engagement process of the stakeholders in education. Thus, the power perspective within the framework of parental aggression should be examined in further studies.

## **Conclusion**

The current study investigated confrontational parent behaviors within teachers' perspectives, which represents experiences of one side of the phenomenon. Future studies should investigate confrontational situations from the perspectives of parents, too. The data were also collected using different methods, i.e. phone, online, face-to-face, and in different places (See Method Section). We experienced small interruptions while collecting data. Future studies are recommended to be conducted in more limited locations to provide a similar data collection experience for all participants. The results of the present study should be evaluated within these limitations.

The study's findings revealed that patterns of parent-teacher interactions might result in serious deficiencies in the classroom atmosphere. Implications at the societal level that cover the experiences of teachers and parents might be worthy of discussing. Indeed, education is a



system that requires building trust among stakeholders in their interpersonal relationships to work in a collaborative harmony for the children. The nature of the relationships is directly related to the perspectives of their counterparts. Considering that schools are the reflections of the society, the society's views regarding early childhood profession still need to evolve. Although it takes time to evolve from existing perspectives, policymakers, educational stakeholders, and academics should develop projects to empower society to understand early childhood institutions' professionalism better. Following Guo et al. (2019) ideas, the teaching profession should be rebuilt by addressing its professionalism and public awareness regarding teachers' expertise. Also, teachers should be armed to establish a strong teaching identity that will help them to create a collaborative climate in schools. As stated by Reay (2008), the leaders of the society and policymakers should “cultivate and grow dispositions of openness and positive recognition of the others in the school context” (p. 1085), to be respectful of each other's knowledge and expectations.

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