

## University Childcare Teachers Perceptions, Beliefs, and Thoughts About Their Profession and Jobs: A Turkish Case

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This research investigated perceptions, feelings and thoughts of early childhood teachers, working at university campus childcare centers in Turkey, regarding their profession and job. Understanding how they make the meaning of challenges, issues, difficulties, and enjoyment, and then connecting those to their job satisfaction, burnout, and stress were the goals. A total of nine early childhood teachers participated in the study. Using a phenomenological research design, two semi-structured focus group interviews, lasting about two hours, were conducted. Results showed that, overall, campus childcare teachers in this study enjoyed working with children despite their challenges of working with parents, low pay, and long and uncompensated work hours. The quality of the relationship with parents seems to have a very powerful effect on teachers' job satisfaction and on their motivation. On the other hand, their love for children and passion about their work as well as having positive work environment help them re-build their motivation. Their personal and collective efficacy helps maintaining their dedication and commitment to the profession.

Studies have shown that teachers' job stress, dissatisfaction and burnout have implications for development of children and are associated with teacher turnover (Hayes, Palmer, & Zaslow, 1990; Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes, 1993). High level of teacher burnout is associated with lower level of curriculum implementation (Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobson, 2009), negative teacher-student interaction (Yoon, 2002), increased likelihood of expulsion in preschool (Walter & Golan, 2006), increased aggressive behaviors (Doumen, Verschueren, Buyse, Germeijs, Luyckx, & Soenens, 2008), and reduced learning motivation (Pakarinen, Kiuru, Lerkkanen, Poikkeus, Siekkinen, & Nurmi, 2010). Lower teacher job satisfaction is associated with higher likelihood of suspension in preschool (Walter & Golan, 2006). A number of studies has shown that teachers' job satisfaction and burnout, and eventually turnover is associated with several personal and organizational factors (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Goelman & Guo, 1998; Tye & O'Brien, 2002). Teachers' perceptions, feelings, and thoughts of whether their experiences and interactions with those factors challenging, concerning, or pleasing, and whether teachers have adequate resources to cope with those challenges and concerns, if there are any, impact teachers' job burnout and job satisfaction.

This article reports the results of a study which investigated perceptions, feelings and thoughts of early childhood teachers working at two campus childcare centers in Turkey, regarding their profession and job. Applying a qualitative approach, we wanted to understand their challenges, issues, concerns, and pleasures and to draw context-based inferences regarding their job satisfaction, burnout, and commitment.

### *Campus child care centers in Turkey*

Traditionally, at most of the universities, university-based child care programs serve as a child development centers, and, in general, have three missions: (1) Provide a site for early childhood teacher education programs to train their teacher candidates; (2) present a model for the local and national early childhood programs; and (3) function as a site for research in child development and early childhood education (McBride, 1996). In addition to the traditional roles of these centers, they serve as "campus

childcare centers” to meet the childcare needs of families (Briley, Reifel, & Paver, 1997). Thus, these programs not only offer a place for training, research and best practice, but also meet the needs of university personnel (academic and non-academic) during the regular work hours.

Historically, since the mid 1900s, Turkish laws required employers with certain number of women employees to open childcare centers at the workplace and regulated rules and qualifications of caregivers (e.g., Decree No: 1272, 1953; Decree No: 6/11648, 1969). The admission priority to those centers was given to children of mothers working at the workplace, or children whose mothers were passed away. Accordingly, many universities in Turkey have also founded campus childcare centers for children of faculty and staff. In time, however, some universities have transformed those campus childcare centers to child development laboratories or embedded in elementary schools as a preschool program and/or kindergarten. Some universities, however, particularly those with technical academic emphasis have maintained campus childcare centers as is. Generally, those centers follow the educational planning proposed by Turkish Ministry of Education. However, depending on the place of childcare center within the university's organizational hierarchy, the qualifications of early childhood workers, rules and regulations of the campus childcare centers vary. In that sense, child care centers at the Turkish university campuses function as both campus (or university-based) and employer-sponsored child care centers and are different from the other child care centers at the public or private sectors. The roots of these differences may be grouped into two categories: contextual component and structural component.

Contextual component of the campus child care centers are different from that of the childcare centers in public or private organizations. Constituents of campus-based childcare centers are children of administrators, faculty (research assistants, assistant professors, associate professors) and staff working at the university. There may be a hierarchy exists among the parents of children and also a hierarchy between the parent and child care staff. Furthermore, parents with higher education may be more knowledgeable about development and education of their children and may hold higher expectations from childcare. Particularly when professional qualifications of the childcare staff are lower, their expectations may be unmet.

Campus childcare centers have distinctive features of organizational structure than any private or public childcare centers in governance, decision-making and many other policy factors that is related to the work environment. In a university organizational structure, the place of campus child care centers is usually invisible, unless the center is integrated within a major educational program. Although the centers have their own center director and staff, their operation (e.g., budget) is tightly bounded by a heavy bureaucracy. The center is usually perceived as a “side facility” to meet the childcare needs of university staff and faculty during regular work hours.

Consequently, the experiences of teachers and staff working at those campus childcare centers may be different from those working at other public or private childcare centers or child development laboratories. Although number of studies have studied early childhood teachers in public or private sector in Turkey (e.g., Akman, Taşkın, Özden, & Çortu, 2010; Deniz Kan, 2008; Tuğrul & Çelik, 2002), or in other countries (e.g., Bogler, 2002; Doumen et al., 2008; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Ransford et al., 2009; Walter & Golan, 2006; Weiqi, 2007; Yoon, 2002), one can hardly find research about perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of teachers working at campus childcare settings. Thus, the first contribution of this research is to help filling this gap by exploring the perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of campus childcare teachers about various aspects of their job and profession as a childcare staff.

The second contribution of this study is that, in contrast with the dominant quantitative methods of studying early childhood teachers' experiences, particularly in relation with job satisfaction and burnout, this study utilized a qualitative approach through focus group interviews which can help

understanding "some of the more nuanced and implicit but equally powerful factors" (Goelman & Guo, 1998, p.189).

### *Challenges and issues*

Research has reported a number of challenges and issues that, in general, teachers may experience. Lack of collegial and administrative support (Zhang & Zhu, 2010), lack of autonomy (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005), work overload (Zhang & Zhu, 2010), student misbehavior or disruptive behaviors (Abel & Sewell, 1999; López et al., 2008), poor working conditions (Abel & Sewell, 1999), role ambiguity, and role conflict (Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982) have been the most cited challenges and issues. Among, and in addition to, those challenges and issues, role ambiguity, role conflict, low salary, working extensive number of hours, and issues with parent professional collaboration are particularly important ones for early childhood workers (Akman et al., 2010; Byrne, 1994; Goelman & Guo, 1998; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Tuğrul & Çelik, 2002; Whitebook, Howes, Darrah, & Friedman, 1982).

Role ambiguity refers to the lack of clarity regarding work objectives, status, obligations, demands and status. Role conflict occurs when one experiences two or more simultaneous tasks such that completing one task makes difficult completing the other (Byrne, 1994). Unclear, ambiguous or conflicting roles and responsibilities of childcare workers include, but not limited to, planning and implementing the curriculum and helping children dress-up, taking care of their self-help needs, acting like a mother, cleaning the childcare center, and preparing the meals (Goelman & Guo, 1998). Those multiple roles of early childhood teachers contribute to emotional exhaustion (Byrne, 1994).

Individuals who chose to go into childcare work because they find it rewarding, and enjoy working with children have more commitment to their profession (Abel & Nelson, 1990; Deniz Kan, 2008). Akman et al. (2010) found that teachers who think that "teaching is just for them" have lower level of burnout compared to those who think that "teaching is not for them". Early childhood teachers' "commitment and job satisfaction, however, are continually challenged by the limited wages, few benefits, and the providers' own perceptions that society considers child care a low status, low skilled position" (Goelman & Guo, 1998, p. 186-187).

Teachers working at childcare centers earn considerably less than other comparably educated women (Goelman & Guo, 1998). The low salary is usually accompanied by unpaid overtime work (Akman et al., 2010; Tuğrul & Çelik, 2002; Whitebook et al., 1982). Noting that early childhood teachers work nonstop for extensive number of hours, Akman and colleagues (2010) found that teachers' work hours were significant predictors of early childhood teachers' burnout. Early childhood teachers perceive families as not eager to interact with the school personnel or to be involved in parent-teacher collaboration (Bernhard, Lefebvre, Kilbride, Chud, & Lange, 1998), which they find overwhelming and exhausting (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008).

If teachers have insufficient and inadequate resources to handle those challenges and issues, they may be burned out and less satisfied with their work. This research was designed to examine campus childcare teachers' feelings, perceptions, and thoughts about their profession and job. Understanding how they make the meaning of challenges, issues, difficulties, and enjoyment and then connecting those feelings, perceptions and thoughts to their job satisfaction, burnout and stress were the goals.

### **Methodology**

A phenomenological research design was used as a qualitative research approach. Phenomenological research design is useful when the researchers aim at "understanding the social phenomena from the actor's own perspective and examining how the world is experienced. The

important reality is what people perceive it to be" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p.3). It involves, in principle, "minimum structure and maximum depth, in practice constrained by time and opportunities to strike a balance between keeping a focus on the research issues and avoiding undue influence by the researcher" (Lester, 1999, p.2). Phenomenological research allows researchers to obtain rich and contextualized data about the participants' view of the world as they define their own experiences.

#### *Research site*

The research site for this study was two campus child care centers located at two different campuses at a public university in Istanbul. The centers served children whose ages ranged from 2 1/2 years to 6 years. One of the centers has been running for about 30 years (will be called as "mother center" from now on) and the other for three years (will be called "infant center" from now on).

The mother center was located at the main campus. It was a two-story building with a playground. The center served 37 children in five classrooms. The class size ranged from four to ten. There were five teachers and two caregivers (called auntie) at the mother center. The director of the mother center was about a 50 years-old female. She graduated from high school with a child development major. She has been the center director for 12 years and worked as a preschool teacher for 16 years before she became the director.

The infant center was located at the relatively newer campus of the university. The building was a one-story building in the middle of the campus surrounded by a large area of playground. It served 36 children with a total of four classrooms. The class sizes ranged between five and 13. There were one director, one assistant director, four teachers and two aunties at the center. The director of the centers was a male faculty member at the faculty of education. Nonetheless, the assistant director was the one mostly in charge of running the center on daily basis. The assistant director was female around her 30s, mother of twins attending the same childcare center. She had a two-year college degree in public relations, and a high school degree in child development. She has been the assistant director for a year. Before becoming the assistant director of the center, she was a teacher for ten years.

#### *Participants*

Prior to recruitment, the researchers were met with center directors and assistant director and informed them about the study. The directors agreed on participating in the study and assisted with recruiting the teachers for interviews. Participation in the study was voluntary.

The participants of the study were nine early childhood teachers working at the campus childcare centers. All of the teachers were female, five of whom were married. Their age ranged from 22 to 40 years old and years of teaching experience ranged from four years to 24 years. All teachers, but one, had a high school degree (Girls Vocational High School) in child development. Four teachers graduated from and three were still students of a two-years open- education college, majoring in child development/early childhood education.

#### *Data collection procedure*

Lester (1999) suggests that in phenomenological studies "[t]he establishment of a good level of rapport and empathy is critical to gaining depth of information, particularly where investigating issues where the participant has a strong personal stake" (p. 2). To establish a relationship with the teachers and develop some empathy, the centers were visited before the study was conducted and some short and informal conversation took place. Thus teachers and center directors were already familiar with the researchers before the interview started. Also, at the beginning of the interview, some informal and warming conversations took place. Then, the researchers introduced themselves, and explained the

purpose, voluntarism, and confidentiality principals of the study. Because the participants expressed that they would feel uncomfortable with tape-recording, researchers used computer and paper-pencil method to record the interview.

Data collection procedure included two stages: teacher questionnaires and focus group interviews. Participants completed the questionnaire in the room before the interviews started. The questionnaire covered the basic questions about demographic information such as age, years of experience, highest level of education and their plans for pursuing higher degree, and about classroom environment such as the age and number of children in their classroom, and their work schedule.

Two focus group interviews, lasting about two hours, were conducted in a room where teachers and researchers sat around a table, in a semi-formal environment. One group included five teachers and the other included four teachers. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, which allowed for in-depth information gathering (Borg & Gall, 1989).

Open-ended interview questions were developed to probe teachers about their thoughts, perceptions and feelings related to their profession and work. As pointed out by several researchers (Blase, 1986; Goelman & Guo, 1998), these open-ended methods (e.g., semi-structured or unstructured interviews or questionnaires) allow understanding the meaning that participants created around their experience in a way in which they express themselves in their own personal and professional contexts.

Teachers responded to the following probes: (1) How and why did you choose early childhood teaching profession? (2) What aspects of your profession and job do you like or dislike? (3) What are the difficulties, challenges and issues you experience in your current job? (4) In which areas and ways do you think you need support and help? Depending on the interviewees' participation, additional probes and prompts were provided to clarify and elaborate teachers' responses.

#### *Data analyses method*

First, the two researchers identified the themes independently, using a starter list of themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) that emerged directly from the interview questions and prompts. These themes included teacher' motivation to choose and remain in the profession, their feelings and perceptions about their jobs and profession, and their thoughts about what they wish to be changed or improved. Next, each themes emerged from starter list was further analyzed to group similar responses together and form new themes for the information that were not in the starter list. Then, the two researchers gathered their arguments and discussed the themes and the reasons upon which the themes were built. Finally, the researchers came up with final major and minor themes, arrived at 100% agreement on them (Hatch, 2002), re-labeled specific statements and experiences, and interpreted the themes or categories based on the research question. Pseudo names were assigned to each teacher to ensure the privacy when reporting the results of the study.

## **Results**

### *Their inspiration for entering and remaining in the profession*

Our first interview question was how and why they chose early childhood teaching profession. Their responses were dominated by their statements about loving children and their passion about working with them.

*“Why? Because I loooooove children...”*

The most frequently cited reason for choosing this profession by teachers was their love towards children. Recall that all teachers, but one, had a high school degree in child development. Se-

ven of eight teachers expressed that they chose child development major in high school because they love children and have passion about working with them. Some statements made by teachers were: “I have loved children since I was a child” (Zeynep). “I chose this profession because it is just for me” (Ayse & Betul). “I chose this profession knowing what it is about. I would chose the same profession if I come to the world one more time” (Funda).

Two teachers indicated that they somehow were pushed by their families and other external factors to this profession. Family members, particularly those who were teachers guided them to choose this profession. Narin further expressed that “I love children, I do my work very well... and I am like a mother. But I would choose another profession if I had a chance. I love my profession, but my dream job is something else.”

All teachers, including those who entered the profession relatively unwillingly, indicated that their love for children and passion about working with them have increased and has become part of who they are over time.

“I have loved the profession. It has become part of me since I was 13. I, myself, have grown with this profession as well” (Ayse). “We do not want to go home on some days (Emine). When we go home we think about what we should and can do the next day” (Betul). “I want to come to the work even at the weekends. I am very happy with working here. I forget everything when I am here” (Kubra).

According to them, their love toward children was like the love a mother would feel for her child; they expressed: “We feel that we are like their mothers, we feel upset when they have hard time learning or when there is a small complain about any of the child, for example” (Betul).

They further explained the reasons for why they love working with children. Among the reasons they listed were children’s genuineness, sincerity, guilelessness, unconditional love, and seeing children grow and accomplish. Some supporting statements made by teachers were as follows:

“Their love toward us is the most enjoyable and lovely thing working with children. They consider us like their parents and they hug and kiss us” (Fatma). “I like their genuineness, sincerity and guilelessness. When they say ‘I love you’ they really mean it” (Emine). “We get positive energy from children” (Zeynep). “Working with them is very fun. You do not get depressed at all. They sometimes change your world with one word they use” (Kubra). “We are like children. We do not grow at all since we are with the children all the time”...“Teaching something to them and learning from them, doing something different everyday... I love it. You learn something different from them. You learn to see things from different perspectives because their perspectives are different from yours” (Betul).

Teachers’ statements also implied that they have a sense of accomplishment by working with children. Some examples of those statements were that

“We love observing children grow, go to elementary and high school, and college. Some get married and we have grandchildren” (Ayse). “There was an autistic child in my classroom. I observed how he had grown over time. I felt that I was very important for him and his development. You shape a human being. You help the child grow. It is very delightful to know and feel that you raise good citizens” (Esra).

#### *Difficulties, stresses and challenges and desired remediations*

The second and third questions asked during the interview were the things they like and dislike about their job and profession and difficulties and challenges of their work. Challenges, and difficulties uttered by teachers were mostly related to parent professional collaboration and what literature reported as adverse work conditions, which included extensive number of work hours, irregular or unavailability of break time, lack of resources (e.g., paper, toys, etc.), low salary, and role ambiguity.

#### *Working with parents*

A statement made by one of the teachers was a summary of statements made by all teachers: “Working with children is very delightful, but not with parents” (Emine). And the others agreed with her strongly. Among the challenges teachers indicated they experienced with parents were that (1) parents’ expectations that were inconsistent, inappropriate, unrealistic and unprofessional, which can be summarized as role ambiguity; (2) parents’ disrespectful and unappreciated attitudes and behaviors toward them as teachers and toward their profession, indicating perceived low status of their profession; and (3) parents’ indifferences towards educational activities at center, and their interference with their teaching and job.

#### *“We are not nannies”*

Teachers’ perceptions about parents’ view on their role and how they define it were of concerns for the teachers. Teachers communicated discrepancy in perception of teachers and parents about the role and definition of early childhood education and educators. Teachers expressed that the way parents interact with them imply that parents consider the function of the center as a place where basic childcare needs are met rather than a place where children are provided with experiences that facilitate their education and development. Accordingly, to them, parents perceived the role of early childhood teachers as a “caregiver or nanny” more than a “teacher”. Some statements made by teachers were

“I do not like being perceived like a caregiver or nanny... Parents consider here as a nursery school (Funda)”. “We are not nannies” (Kubra). “Parents expect everything from us. They interfere with what teachers do at the center” (Ayse).

On the other hand, teachers see themselves educators, nurturers, mothers and caregivers and “artists”, who shape a piece of dough. They communicated that “we are like artists. We shape the child’s character and future” (Kubra).

#### *“All we want is respect”*

Teachers indicated that parents’ inappropriate language and approach to communicate about their children’s care and education at the center is disrespectful, upsetting and demoralizing. Teachers complained that parents’ approach is assertive and disrespectful. Esra, for example, said that

“Parents give orders like ‘make sure the child does not sleep’... ‘make sure the child eats his or her lunch’... And they do it when children are around us. Then the child acts like a boss and gives order to us because they observe their parents giving orders to us about them. Children say things to us like ‘my mom told you that I do not have to sleep’... ‘my mom told you to close the window’ ‘my dad said this’... so on... Then, sometimes we react to children”.

Agreeing with Esra’s point, Funda added that

“Children lose their trust in us and respect for us as teachers. I felt very upset for a while when I had continuously experienced this kind of issues with parents. I felt like

I am a nanny. I did not want to come to work. I distanced myself from the parents and avoided communicating with them”.

It was clearly stated by the teachers that teachers felt disrespected by the parents despite all the efforts they put to care and teach their children.

“We are with their children nonstop during the day. We do not take any break at all. We think of every little, single detail about caring and educating their children, as if they are our own children. Parents do not even recognize how much time and energy we put to care for their children without receiving any benefit we should receive. All we want is to be ‘respected’, respected as a teacher.” said, Esra.

Teachers’ later statements such as the one Funda made below indicated that they were able to manage to overcome these feelings.

“But we have to do what is the best and right thing to do. Because when you are involved in a negative interaction with the child, you react not only the parents, but sometimes to the child, too. And children are the ones who get hurt or impacted by this. So, I think we have to think and care about the child however the parents act or whatever the parents say”.

*“Without family support, nothing works!”*

Teachers believed that there has to be continuity between the childcare center and home and they said there is not. Teachers were worried that parents do not care much about the activities that were asked to be completed at home. For example, Emine said that

“We give some activities to be completed at home and returned back to the center. Yet, most of the time, the activities are not returned, sometimes thrown to the trash in front of our eyes. Sometimes, we teach a behavior or manner at the center and ask parents to implement it at home; but parents do not take this request seriously. Thus, whatever we do at the center is not as effective as it should be; because there is no continuity.”

And for them there are two main reasons for this discontinuity: the first is that parents are not interested in what their children do at the center and the second is that they are unable to comprehend the importance of the activities done at the center for their children’s learning and development. They suggest that parents need to be educated about the importance of the continuity and consistency of what is done at school and what parents do at home. The second reason is that they do not have time because parents are usually faculty members and/ or graduate students who continue to work at home. “Family is very important. Whatever we do at home, if it is not supported at home by the parents, does not work” (Funda).

*“Know-everything parents”*

Teachers articulated challenges of working with parents who have higher educational levels than they do. Specifically, they expressed that their professional qualities and capabilities underestimated by the parents, and parents’ attitudes were degrading. Emine, for example, vocalized that

“Many parents are faculty members or have a masters or doctoral degree. Since they work at the university, they think they know everything, and we do not know



anything. Such beliefs of theirs are reflected in their attitudes toward us. That hurts our feelings and causes us to lose our motivation”.

It seemed that teachers developed a reaction to this attitude, evidenced by Narin's and Betul's expressions, upon which other teachers agreed.

“We know about children and child development more than they do. We deal with a lot of children here while they take care of one or two children at home” (Narin). “Parents are not very knowledgeable about their own children's development. When we say something about their children they do not want to accept. Some are incapable of handling misbehaviors or have no time to deal with it. Unfortunately, their observations and evaluations of their children are not realistic and accurate. However, they think that it is us, teachers, who are incapable and unknowledgeable about child development and specifically about development of their children” (Betul). “There has to be some workshops about child development and other issues for parents offered by experts other than us. Parents do not participate in the workshops that we offer” added, Funda.

#### *Extensive and uncompensated work hours*

At the university, regular work hours are from 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM, including at least 30 minutes lunch time. This time period also includes at least one 5-10 minutes break in the morning and in the afternoon for non-academic personnel. In early childhood teachers' case, according to the teachers, they are with children all the time including the lunch and break time and thus, they do not have any break time. They said that they do have to work even when children are sleeping. “We do not have any personal or break time during the day. We take turns when we eat our lunch. There are days we can't even go to restroom for all day”, said Ayse, and “We eat our lunch very quickly so that our friends could eat their lunch”, added Fatma.

According to the teachers, given all those sacrifices that they make to work with children, their salary is very low. The reason for this is that their occupation is not defined as teacher formally; rather their position is defined as regular office clerk position. In other words, they work as teachers but get paid as a clerk. This inconsistency creates dissatisfaction with the salary.

“Our positions are defined as ‘office clerks’, who have official break time and who get paid if they overwork. So, although, officially, we have break time during the lunch time, we can't use it because we can't leave children alone and we spend our break time by working. Neither is this overwork time compensated”, Ayse explained. Narin added “Our salary must be different from what an office clerk earns.”

Moreover, using their annual leave and even visiting a doctor's office when they get sick sometimes becomes a serious problem. The reason for these issues usually stem from the lack of staff at the center to instruct their students while they are away.

“We can't even use our annual leave when we want or need. Sometimes, we do not even use doctor excuses when we have medical issues.” expressed, Betul. Zeynep continued “Because, if we are not at work for any reason, regardless of whether it is vacation time, health issues or professional development purposes, our colleagues have to take over our responsibilities and we do not want it.”

#### *Child-care center as a step child*

The centers are governed by the Health, Culture and Sports Department at the university. Thus, teachers appear to work as an office clerk at the center and the expenses and other regulations are handled by this department. According to the teachers, they are like “step-child” not only at the university, but within the department as well.

“We are the personnel of the Health, Culture and Sports Department, but they always give priority to the personnel working at the main office. They treat us like step children. We do not hear about anything or any activity that we could also benefit from or participate in”, said Betul and continued, “We are like in a closed-box. We get in the building in the morning with children and leave the building with children”.

Teachers (confirmed by the directors interviewed in a separate meeting) expressed that budgets of these two childcare centers are governed by Health, Culture and Sports Department of the university, and the department have budgets for only operational expenses, but not for educational materials, or toys. That is why “we do not have enough materials, toys etc. at the center”, said (Emine) and other teachers agreed with her. Teachers expressed that director and teachers at the center usually try to work with parents to obtain the materials and supplies they need, which sometimes creates unpleasant interactions between the parents and center staff. For example, Funda said that

“We ask parents to bring the materials that we need. Some parents bring, some do not. We sometimes have conversations with parents about those things that I think we are not supposed to have. Some parents argue with us.”

They indicated that they need to be provided not only with the educational materials and toys for the children, but also with the technical equipment such as computers, copiers, and printers. Fatma said that “we do not get unused or new equipment at all. When they [Health, Culture and Sports Department] update their computers or other equipment, they give the old one to us.” For them the reason for this ignorance or being treated as a step child is that “the university administration and parents consider this center as a nursery school where children of the university employees are babysat when parents are working. They do not consider here as an educational institution” (Emine).

#### *Need for continuing professional development*

The teachers indicated that they need to be updated with the new developments in the early childhood field. To do so, they expressed their interests to attend professional conferences, seminars, and professional development activities. Expostulating, Ayse said that

“We work at a university in Istanbul. Theoretically, we are at the center of a very rich educational environment. Because we are in Istanbul and we work at a higher institution where knowledge is right there. But we are unable to use the potential benefit of working at a higher institution to reach the information we need. It is mostly because we are not informed about the activities or our facility do not have enough staff support in order for us to leave the center and attend any professional activities.”

#### *The level of control they have over the curriculum and curricular activities*

Teachers told that there is no curriculum or educational plan that they are required to follow. However, they did choose a program with the colleagues at the center and have been implementing it. Each center uses different curriculum program. Even though they have a program that they use, they

make changes, add activities or lessons to the program or do not use some of it. "We change the program according to children's interest and level" said Ayse. Funda added

"For some children the lessons and activities are very simple because they have more stimulating learning environment at home. Some children do not have this privileged environment at home. We are trying to balance our program for all children based on their development and educational experiences."

#### *Purpose of preschool and early childhood*

The purpose of preschool, according to the teachers, is primarily to facilitate socialization and then preparing children for the school. In addition they indicated that it should help to raise individuals who are self-sufficient and good citizens. Betul said that "They should be self-sufficient individuals; able to make their own decision; and be respectful for others' rights." Fatma expressed that "Also, the preschool should support the child in developing their self-help skills and should promote creativity". Teachers see themselves educators, nurturers, mothers, caregivers, and "artists", who shape a piece of dough. They communicated that "we are like artists. We shape the child's character and future" (Kubra).

On the other hand, teachers pointed out the shift in the focus of the preschool and early childhood education from 'facilitating children's socialization and being self-sufficient individuals' to 'the academically-oriented educational settings. Funda, for example indicated that "we become more like a primary school teachers now. Children want to learn more. They know more words. They used to know counting up to 10, now they can do addition and subtraction".

#### **Discussion**

This study explored the campus child care teachers' issues, challenges, concerns, and feelings about their work and working with children, qualitatively. We focused on the campus child care because those centers are different from other public and private childcare centers, structurally and constitutionally. Also, although some of the issues, challenges, perceptions and feelings campus childcare teachers may have are often discussed in informal settings, they are largely underrepresented group of teachers and have been neglected by the researchers. If studied, generally, quantitative methods with pre-determined questions were used. Using a qualitative method allowed identifying "some important but difficult to measure factors" (Goelman & Guo, 1998, p. 186) about campus childcare teachers' work and profession.

The findings of the study can be summarized as follows: (1) Teachers' love towards children and passion about working with children inspired them to be an early childhood teacher and motivate them to remain in the profession; (2) they enjoy working with children; (3) they carry the characteristics of teachers with high personal and collective efficacy; (4) their biggest challenge and concern is partnering with parents. They expect parents to be reasonable, respectful, and appreciated, and involved in their children's care and education; (5) they work long hours without any break time or any compensation; (6) they report adverse work conditions such as role conflict, role ambiguity, and lack of resources; (7) they want to participate in professional development activities and to be part of university community; (8) they want childcare centers to be given their deserved place by the university administrators and parents; (9) they see childcare center as a place where children's development in all domains are facilitated; and (10) they aim children to be self-sufficient individuals and good citizens.

Results of this study showed that there are similarities and differences with previous research in the challenges, issues, perceptions, and feelings of campus childcare teachers about their profession and

work. Among the similarities, teachers' motivation for choosing the profession and reasons for remaining both in the profession and in the work environment come first. It appeared that teachers' love and passion about children and the profession motivated them to become early childhood teachers. As found in previous childcare research (Manlove, 1993; Pettygrove, Whitebook, & Weir, 1984; Stremmel, 1991), "being with children", "enjoying working with them", "seeing children grow", "feeling of being important for children's life" were some feelings expressed by teachers about what they like regarding their job and profession. Those expressions suggest that being and working with children were a rewarding experience for teachers. It also appeared that nature of the work such as children's natural reactions, developmental patterns, sincerity, and attachment to teachers give teachers a high level of contentment.

Some other findings of the study that is in agreement with the previous research (e.g., Akman et al., 2010; Bernhard et al., 1998; Goelman & Goe, 1998; Tuğrul & Çelik, 2002; Whitebook et al., 1982) were issues with parent-professional collaboration, low salaries, lack of resources, role ambiguity, and role conflict. The biggest challenge campus childcare teachers in this study expressed was about parent-professional collaboration. As reported in the literature (e.g., Goelman & Guo, 1998), teachers believed that parents perceive their profession as low-status, not a teacher but a nanny. According to the teachers, parents' attitudes and behaviors toward them are inappropriate, disrespectful, unpleasant, and unappreciated; their expectations from the teachers are not professional, but more like a nanny, as if teachers had only their child in the class; they value childcare center as a place where children are under an adult care during parents' work hours as opposed to a place where children are cared, educated, and socialized. Supporting the findings of Bernhard et al. (1998), teachers believed that parents are not eager to be involved in their children's education, and show no interest or low level of interest in their children's activities and products that they had at the center. Teachers noted that not all of these problems come from ill-intentions of parents; rather it is mostly because of the lack of parent education about the value and roles of early childhood education and teacher.

Teachers also criticized parents about their inconsistent and discontinued approaches with those of teachers to child discipline and education. Congruent with a study conducted by Bernhard et al. (1998), teachers believed that there are significant home-childcare differences in child-rearing practices. Teachers felt that they try to give autonomy and help children to be self-sufficient individuals, whereas parents baby, spoil, or inappropriately raise their children at home. This finding is interesting because such differences are usually detected when parents and childcare teachers are from different ethnic and cultural background, as in the study by Bernhard et al. (1998). In this case, both parents and teachers are from the same nation and have similar cultural values about childrearing practice. Thus, it may be speculated that there may be variation in childrearing practices within the same culture, and child rearing practices are influenced by many other factors (e.g., parents' childhood experience, educational level, life style, expectations from the child, and so on) apart from the culture defined within a broader context of ethnicity.

Sources of these adverse conditions are unique for campus childcare teachers resulting from contextual and structural differences of campus childcare centers from other public or private childcare centers. Among those are that having parents with an advance degree creates some conflicts because they believe that "know-everything parents" underestimate teachers' professional qualifications and abilities. This challenge is particularly specific to campus childcare teachers because some of the parents have higher educational level than teachers. The other challenge is about job definition and position title. That is, teachers working at these centers do not have a teacher title. Yet, they work as a teacher but get paid and treated as a regular office clerk. Finally, because budgets of these two childcare centers are governed by Health, Culture and Sports Department of the university, the centers do not

have enough resource to purchase toys, educational materials, and office supplies, which sometimes creates unpleasant interactions between the parents and center staff.

Agreeing with previous research (e.g., Grayson & Alvarez, 2008), it seemed that teachers were emotionally exhausted by role ambiguity, long working hours, low salary, and inefficient partnerships with parents. All those factors are found to be associated with childcare workers' job burnout by previous research (Manlove, 1993). On the other hand, teachers appeared to have high level of organizational commitment, enjoyment working with children, and good relationship with center directors and co-workers, which research (Manlove, 1993) have reported as factors relevant with lower level burnout. Early research has identified that teachers who complain about the matters such as lack of parental involvement, salary, and work conditions may be experiencing the early signs of burnout (Seiderman, 1978). In addition, participants of this study seem to have relatively high level of personal and collective efficacy beliefs, which may help them to cope with job stress and challenges and issues, as it was found in several studies (Dorman, 2003; Klassen, Usher, & Bong, 2010; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). They demonstrated such characteristics of teachers with high self-efficacy identified by Ashton (1984) as feeling "good about teaching, about themselves and about their students", feeling that "their work with students is important and meaningful" and "being confident that they are able to influence student learning" (p.29). They also used the word "we" rather than "I", referring themselves as a group, which suggest that they have developed a sense of community and feel a good level of collective teaching efficacy.

It also seemed that teachers experience role conflicts, such as curriculum planning and implementation, helping children dress-up, taking care of their self-help needs, and acting like a mother, similar to those listed by Goelman and Guo (1998). Nonetheless, disagreeing with Byrne (1994) who reported that role conflict creates emotional exhaustion, they gave the impression that they have the capacity to manage all and like to be busy and handle everything smoothly.

Although teachers' burnout and job satisfaction were not measured directly or with any specific scale, generally, teachers in this study appeared to have a legitimate level of job satisfaction, which was mainly stemmed from their enjoyment working with children. This finding is consistent with previous childcare research which suggests that nature of the work gives childcare staff a high level of job satisfaction (Jorde-Bloom, 1988; Modigliani, 1986; Stremmel, 1991; Stremmel, Benson, & Powell, 1993; Pettygrove et al., 1984), which is often associated with a higher degree of commitment in the profession (Manlove, 1993; Pettygrove et al., 1984; Stremmel, 1991).

This study comes with several limitations. The first is that all of the study participants were females, thus male early childhood teachers' perspectives are not presented here. The second, as this is a qualitative study and conducted at a large university located in a big city, the findings cannot be generalized beyond the study context or environments that are very similar to those in this study. Finally, the study did not utilize any quantitative instruments that measure teachers' job satisfaction or burnout, and thus any inferences regarding those are subjective.

Overall, campus childcare teachers in this study enjoyed working with children despite their challenges working with parents, low pay, and long and uncompensated work hours. This finding is consistent with previous research (Kontos & Stremmel, 1988). Nonetheless, the quality of the relationship with parents seems to have a very powerful effect on teachers' job satisfaction. Teachers in this study clearly indicated that when they felt that they are disrespected and/or are perceived as nannies, not early childhood teachers or professionals, they lose their motivation for working in childcare. On the other hand, their love for children and passion about their work as well as their positive work environment (e.g., supportive colleagues and directors) help them re-build their motivation. Their personal and collective efficacy also serves as a mediator to maintain their dedication and commitment to the profession.

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