

# Back to Basics: What Do Parents and Teachers Expect of Early Childhood Education and Care?

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## Abstract

*Recent developments in the area of early childhood education and care (ECEC) lead to more academically-oriented decisions taken in classrooms. Although, this attempt had positive outcomes, the academia has forgotten to pay attention to the ideas and expectations of parents and teachers. The purpose of this study is to create a research agenda to get professions' attention back to what parents and teachers want for children. For this purpose, the sample of 286 parents and forty seven preschool teachers were asked to fill out a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of statements about parents' and teachers' expectations of ECEC settings and their roles in children's lives. Findings indicate that while parents see themselves as responsible for developing children's self-sufficiency and social skills with adults, teachers consider themselves responsible for developing children's academic, self-expression, and gross-motor skills. Parents and teachers agree that the preschool curriculum should allow children to learn things by themselves, encourage children to be curious and ask questions, and be flexible enough to meet each child's learning needs. It is important to understand parents and teachers ideas and expectations of preschool education to shape the policy and practice that are valued by the culture and the context.*

*Keywords:* Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), Parents' and Teachers' Roles and Expectations, Curriculum, Teacher, Environment.

## Introduction

Decades ago, studies in early childhood education and care (ECEC) were shaped around the topics of parents' and teachers' views and understandings of early years education and children in general (Weikart, 1999). However in recent years, researchers' interests have tended towards creating universal quality systems and establishing standards that are applicable to different settings (ACEI Global Guidelines, 2006; Bredekamp & Copple, 2000). Newly created standards have provided a new framework for many more studies in various countries (Abu-Jaber, Al-Shawareb, & Gheith, 2010; Gol-Guven, 2009; Rentzou, 2010). The interests of researchers have been extended by findings of positive outcomes of quality in children's lives (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2003). Unexpectedly, the research in this area has led to a valuable discussion among researchers and practitioners. A critical issue in the discussion is the probability of agreement on the term "quality" and on standards that create a common ground for researchers and practitioners in ECEC settings around the world (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007). Cultural values, beliefs, understandings, and contextual differences in ECEC policies and practices influence the definition of quality and opinions about standards. Therefore, the need for building a foundation of ECEC practices based on cultural and contextual variables becomes crucial.

Researchers have emphasized the need for understanding child growth and development from a socio-cultural/ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979;

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Rogoff, 2003; Super & Harkness, 1997; Woodhead, 1996). By approaching the study of child development from a socio-cultural perspective, researchers are able to understand the role of the child in his/her family, schools, communities and neighborhoods, seeing culture and context as factors influencing child development (Myers, 1995; Opper & Olmstead, 1999). Also included in these investigations is the interplay among various systems surrounding the child as the child grows and adapts to challenges in the environment (Crahay, 1994). Researchers have also suggested that children's early life experiences are a determining factor in their attainment of competent cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social behaviors later in life (Dyson & Genishi, 1993; Gallahue, 1993; Stern, 1985; Weikart, 1999).

Socio-cultural/ecological perspective places a greater emphasis on the influence of cultural and environmental factors than other influences (Papalia & Olds, 1995). Socio-cultural/ecological theory implies that it is important to take children's environment into consideration in order to understand child development. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), reciprocal interactions between the child and his/her environment, which is extended to incorporate interconnections between systems (e.g., family, school, social and health services, culture), determine a child's healthy growth. From the socio-cultural/ecological perspective, interlocking relationships between systems determine the environment in which the child grows.

Super and Harkness (1997) suggest that the term "developmental niche" is a unique concept that assigns a contextual feature to child development. The concept of developmental niche has three integrated components: the physical and social setting of the child, the beliefs and attitudes of caregivers, and the practices of childcare and childrearing. This framework views cultural practices as factors that determine a child's experiences. By addressing the cultural differences in ECEC, it is possible to enhance our understanding of how different educational practices affect child development. As Moss and Pence (1994) have pointed out, children, parents, families, society, local communities, and particular ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities all benefit from early care and education services. Most countries are now beginning to realize that not only do ECEC services fulfill parents and children's needs, but also that they serve families and society as a whole. The study of cultural understandings of ECEC might help these services to be carried out in more meaningful ways.

Although there is growing interest in the field regarding the cultural context of educational programs, a sizable body of literature focuses either on parents' or on teachers' perspectives of early childhood education. Studies addressing the reciprocal roles of these two important groups are crucial to an understanding of children's development (Opper & Olmstead, 1999). Also, adults' views of early years education have received less attention in under-developed or developing countries than in developed countries (Myers, 1995). This study aims to investigate the relationships between the child's home and school by looking at parents' and teachers' roles and expectations of preschool services in Turkey.

### **Preschool Education in Turkey**

In order to increase the number of literate citizens, Turkish educators and policymakers have traditionally emphasized compulsory primary education rather than preschool education. In 2010, 98% of school-age children were enrolled in eight years of mandatory primary education (MNE Statistics, 2010). In contrast, many younger children have not had access to ECEC services, particularly children from low-income families in rural areas.

Over 70 million people live in Turkey. The six million children under five years of age constitute 10% of the total population (OECD Stat Extracts, 2010). According to MNE Statistics 2010, only 27% of children between the ages of three and five were enrolled in preschools in 2010. A majority in urban areas have access to preschool education: out of 980,654 children attending preschools, 713,429 are in cities and 267,225 are in villages (MNE Statistics, 2010). The goal of the Ministry of National Education is to raise preschool enrollments to 70% by the year 2014, targeting children from disadvantaged families in rural areas (MNE Strategic Plan, 2009).

According to the Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2006), the gross enrollment ratio (GRE) in pre-primary education worldwide was 37% in 2004, 77% in developed countries and 32% in developing countries, but only 8% in Turkey. Enrollment statistics indicate two important points: (a) a majority of Turkish preschoolers start primary education without any preschool education, and (b) although the enrollment percentage has increased from 8% to 27% from 2004 to 2010, Turkish children have limited access to preschool education in comparison with their peers in other countries.

Furthermore, the children who do enter preschools are faced with the limited quality of ECEC services. For instance, the child-teacher ratio, acknowledged as one of the quality indicators of a ECE programs, is approximately 23:1 in Turkey (MNE Statistics, 2010) whereas the rate recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children is 15:1 or up to 25:2 with the addition of a second adult (Bredenkamp & Coople, 2000). Thus, there is a growing need to increase the number of preschool teachers in Turkey.

Because the main concern is to raise the enrollment rate in preschool services, not much has been done to raise the standards of early childhood education in Turkey. Higher standards do, in fact, appear in MNE policy statements, and parents and teachers are aware of them, but as of now, unfortunately, the availability and the quality of preschool services are well below the expectations and goals of the public and the state (Gol-Guven, 2009, Varol, 2012).

### **The Expectations of Parents and Teachers**

A sizable body of research highlights the importance of home-school continuity on child development (Honig, 1979; Jeynes, 2010). Parental responsibility for childrearing is generally shared by other adults, mainly by teachers in early childhood institutions. Thus, examining the differences and similarities in parents' and teachers' understanding of child development and expectations of early childhood education enhances our understanding of educational practices.

The educational level, socioeconomic status, and cultural backgrounds of parents have been studied as factors having an impact on children's development and learning (Barton & Coley, 2007; Burchinal & Nelson, 2000; Kabadayi, 2010; Liang, Fuller, & Singer, 2000). Likewise, factors such as perceptions, beliefs, and practices that are more directly related to the education of young children have been investigated (Charlesworth et al., 1993; Erdiller & McMullen, 2004; Kucukturan, 2011; Micklo, 1993). There is also a growing interest in comparing parental and educational factors. For instance, the IEA Preprimary Project (Weikart, 1999) was conducted to determine the inter-related factors influencing child development and education.

Although there is little research comparing the perceptions of reciprocal relationships of parents and teachers, a number of studies have been conducted to investigate their different expectations regarding child development (Lindauer & Harris, 1989; Weikart, 1999; Winetsky, 1978). Researchers also addressed parents' and teachers' expectations related to teaching strategies, administrative issues, and educational policies (Al-lawati, 1999; Vidali, 1998). Additionally, cross-cultural and within-country studies and studies of education for immigrants have added to the research base clarifying beliefs and practices in preschools (McMullen et al., 2005; Isik-Ercan, 2010; Varol, 2012; Wen, Elicker, & McMullen, 2011).

Varol (2012) interviewed 28 preschool teachers and observed their classroom practices in Turkey. Although the teachers claimed that providing children with materials for hands-on activities is important, observations showed that the only available materials actually provided were textbooks, paper for drawing, play dough, and some stuffed animals. Rote counting and the naming of numbers and colors were the most observed instructional strategies. Moreover, while the teachers reported that professional development is important, they attended only two seminars during the school year. It is also interesting to note that although the national curriculum and teacher education programs emphasize mathematics, science, and language arts, the findings of the study show that only 20% of instruction time was allocated to these subjects.

The findings of a research study conducted by Kucukturan (2011) in Turkey, which analyzed the responses of 500 parents in structured interviews, showed that parents' expectations of teachers fall into three predominant categories: professional (i.e., knowledgeable of child development, participating in seminars, reading publications), personal (i.e., being a caring and responsible person), and competent (i.e., preparing appropriate materials and able to teach in various content areas). It is stated in the study that parents expect teachers to be qualified in the area of ECEC and to carry some personal traits specific to the ECEC profession.

In recent years, the questions asked by researchers and practitioners have shifted from what should be taught to why and how young children should be taught (Koralek, Colker, & Dodge, 1995). As a result, researchers and policy makers in industrialized countries have supported the development of certain criteria and regulations intended to ensure developmentally appropriate ECEC programs for children and are hoping to gain widespread compliance in different cultures and contexts.

However, two concerns are raised by practitioners. First, objectives developed by governing bodies may not fulfill the expectations and needs of parents and teachers. Second, universal guidelines and standards may not be applicable in diverse cultures

with differing views of children and education. To understand these issues, it becomes essential to investigate what in ECEC parents and teachers value. The main purpose of the present study is to examine Turkish parents' and teachers' expectations of child development, curriculum, teachers, and preschools and their preferred roles in these areas.

### **Method**

This study was conducted in Istanbul, a city with a population of more than thirteen million (TUIK, 2011). The sample was limited to a suburb of Istanbul, Bakirkoy, a town with residents from varied socio-economic backgrounds. Bakirkoy has a variety of public and private preschools for young children, thereby providing the opportunity to study a representative sample. After collecting the list of all preschools from the Educational Directorate of Bakirkoy, nine preschools were randomly selected. After the aim of the study was explained in interviews with the school principals, three private preschools chose not to participate; thus the final sample consisted of three public and three private preschools. The classrooms of these participating schools were randomly selected at the time of the visits. The parents of children in these classrooms, who agreed to participate by signing the informed consent form, were given a questionnaire to complete.

### **Participants**

Two hundred and ninety-four parents agreed to participate in the study. The overall response rate was 75.3%. Because eight of the returned questionnaires were incomplete they were not entered into the analyses. Demographic information of the final sample of 286 parents is shown in Table 1.

Forty-seven "teachers" participated in the study, about 50% of whom were interns, girls under 19 years of age enrolled in a vocational high school; 15% were teachers between the ages of 20 to 25; 18% between 26 and 31; 4% between 32 and 37; 6% between 38 and 43; and 7% over 44. Fifteen percent were graduates of the same or similar vocational high schools; 8% were graduates of 2-year community colleges; and 13% were enrolled in part-time college courses. Only 15% were university graduates in the area of early childhood education.

**Table 1.** Demographics of the parents

<b>Demographics</b>	<b><u>n</u></b>	<b><u>%</u></b>
Mother	218	76.5
Father	56	19.6
Mothers employed	100	35
Married	263	92
Age		
Below 25	7	2.5
26-31	60	21
32-37	119	43
38-43	74	26
Above 44	20	7.5
Education		
Elementary	23	8.5
Junior-high	23	8.5
High	123	44
Community College	17	6
University	74	27
Graduate School	16	6
Income		
Low income	60	22
Low-middle income	97	35.5
Middle income	68	25
High income	48	17.5

### **Instruments**

#### *Parents' and Teachers' Responsibilities and Expectations Questionnaire (PTRE)*

The Parents' and Teachers' Responsibilities and Expectations Questionnaire (PTRE) was developed for the present study to provide a culturally sensitive instrument for gathering data related to parents' and teachers' overall expectations of early childhood care and education. The questionnaire consisted of four parts concerning (a) responsibility for teaching child development skills, (b) the characteristics of the preschool curriculum, (c) the characteristics of teachers, and (d) the characteristics of the preschool environment. The questionnaire was developed by using the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) Preprimary Project's Expectation Questionnaire as a guide (Weikart, 1999). Professional guidelines and cultural values guided development of the statements used for ranking expectations (Accreditation Criteria and Procedures, the National Association for the Education of

Young Children (NAEYC), 1998a; Bredekamp & Copple, 2000; Chen, Krechevsky, Viens, & Isberg, 1998; Guide to Accreditation, NAEYC, 1998b; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998; High/Scope Program Quality Assessment-PQA, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 1998).

To ensure that the questionnaire reflected Turkish culture, some items such as the teaching of Turkish values and religious practices were added to the general statements related to ECEC. Three experts in ECEC reviewed the questionnaire item by item for content validity, and recommended changes were made in the questionnaire. The experts also pointed out social desirability response bias that is more likely to be seen in traditional-collectivist cultures. Instead of Likert-type surveys in which responses are based on the level of agreement, the experts suggested that categorized or ordered response options would be more culturally appropriate.

#### *Responsibility for child development and learning*

Twenty items encompassing eight areas were used to examine responsibilities for the teaching of child developmental skills: social skills with peers, social skills with adults, gross motor skills, academic skills, self-expression skills, self-sufficiency (self-care) skills, self-assessment skills, and language skills. In the categories of social skills with peers and social skills with adults, there were three questions. In the categories of academic skills, gross-motor skills, art and play skills, and personality development, there were two questions. In the category of language skills there were four questions. After the lead-in statement "Whose responsibility is it to assist your child with learning the following skills," parents and teachers were asked to respond by choosing one of three choices: parents' responsibility, teachers' responsibility, or parents' and teachers' (both) responsibility. For each question, frequency percentages based on the answers of parents and teachers were calculated, and subsequently the average of the percentages comprised the final analysis.

#### *Expectations of the ECEC Curriculum, Teachers, and Environment*

Ten items for each of three constructs – curriculum, teacher, and environment – were used to examine expectations. Ten items for each of the constructs were ranked by parents and teachers from the most important to the least important. The curriculum construct include items such as allowing children to learn things by themselves, providing English lessons, and providing opportunities for group work. Some of the qualities recognized the concerns of stakeholders in the Turkish system, such as teachers having a college degree, having experience and a good teaching record, showing patience and a compassionate rapport with children, and setting firm rules in the classroom. Items for the environment construct included statements related to the availability and appropriateness of toys, books, and other materials, the student-teacher ratio, safety, and cleanliness.

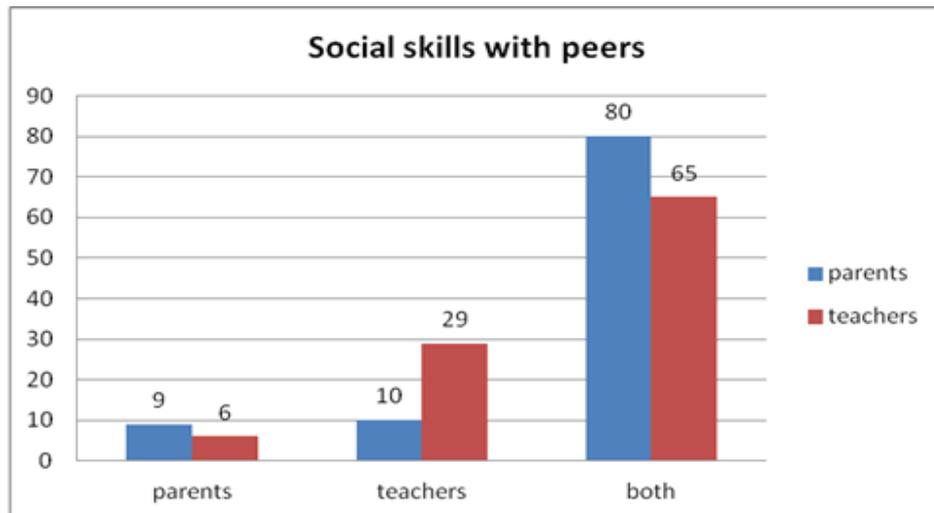
## Results

### *Responsibility for Child Development and Learning*

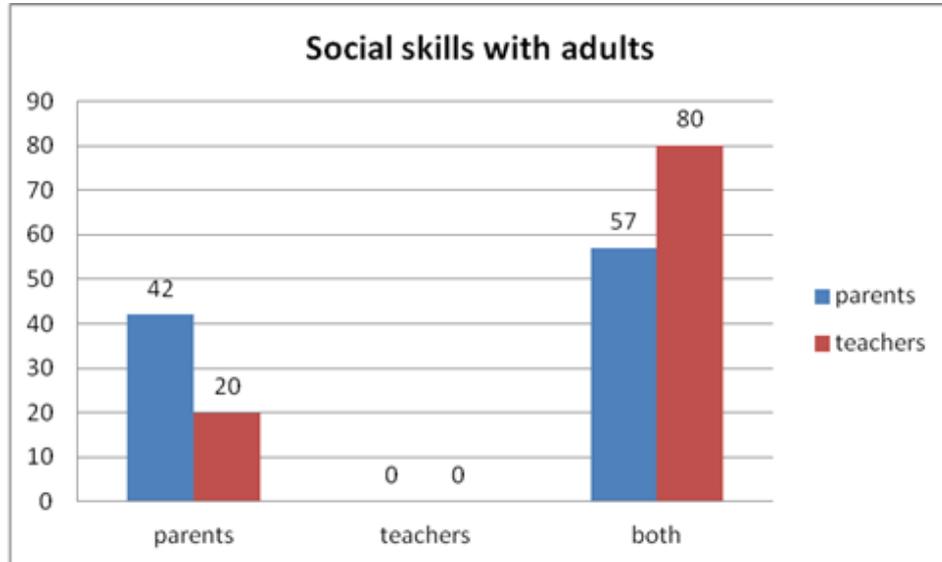
Parents and teachers were asked to indicate who they thought should take responsibility for teaching in eight developmental areas. The total number of items was twenty. The areas included social skills with peers, social skills with adults, academic skills, gross-motor skills, self-expression skills, self-sufficiency (self-care) skills, self-assessment skills, and language skills. The bar charts show the frequency percentages of responses in each area.

Developing children's ability to interact with peers was considered to be a shared responsibility for parents and teachers (80% for parents, 65% for teachers). However, 29% of the teachers see themselves as primarily responsible for fostering a child's social skills with other children, whereas 6% of the teachers see parents as the person responsible for developing such skills. According to parents' responses, 9% of parents see themselves as primarily responsible in this area, whereas 10% said that teachers are responsible for improving children's relationships with their peers (Figure 1).

Concerning the child's social skills with adults, parents and teachers differed (Figure 2). Forty-two percent of the parents considered themselves responsible for helping children develop successful relationships with adults. Fifty-seven percent of the parents and 80% of the teachers indicated that developing a child's social skills with adults is the duty of both parents and teachers. 20% of teachers reported that the skill needs to be developed by parents. Neither the parents nor the teachers consider this duty to be the responsibility of teachers alone.



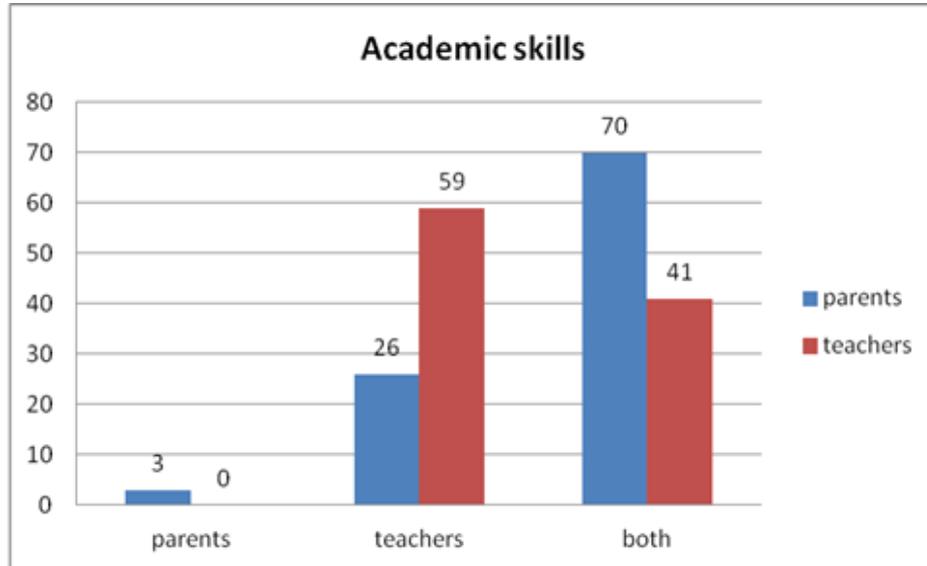
**Figure 1.** Frequency percentages of parents' and teachers' responses for social skills with peers



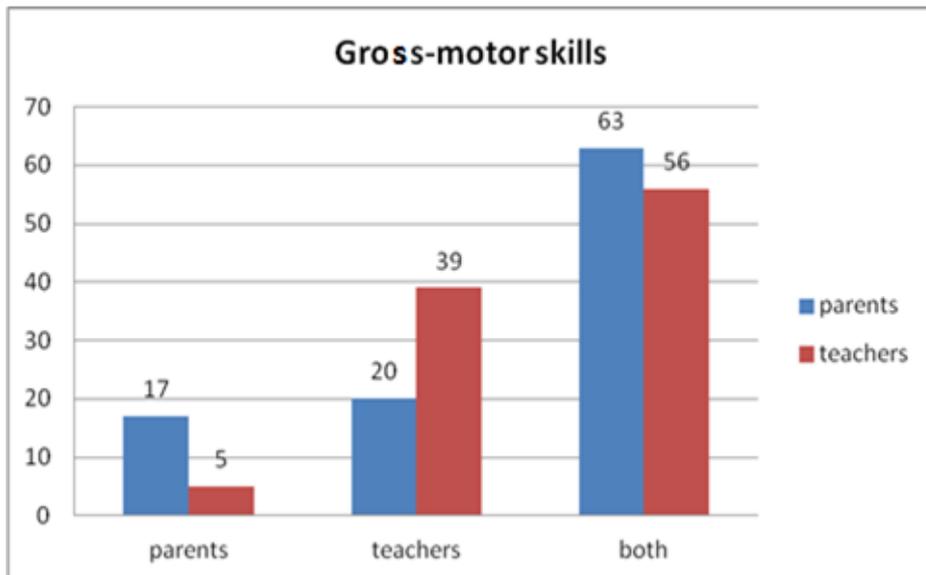
**Figure 2.** Frequency percentages of parents' and teachers' responses for social skills with adults

Figure 3 shows that 70% of parents and 41% of teachers stated that both parents and teachers jointly are responsible for developing the academic skills of children. However, 59% of teachers stated that the teacher alone is responsible. Twenty six percent of parents believed that teachers alone are responsible, and none of the teachers believed that parents alone are responsible in this area, only 3% of parents said it is their responsibility to develop academic skills in their children.

Sixty-three percent of parents and 56% of teachers indicated that developing children's gross motor skills is a shared responsibility. However, 39% of teachers considered themselves to be solely responsible and 5% of teachers handed the responsibility to parents (Figure 4).



**Figure 3.** Frequency percentages of parents' and teachers' responses for academic skills



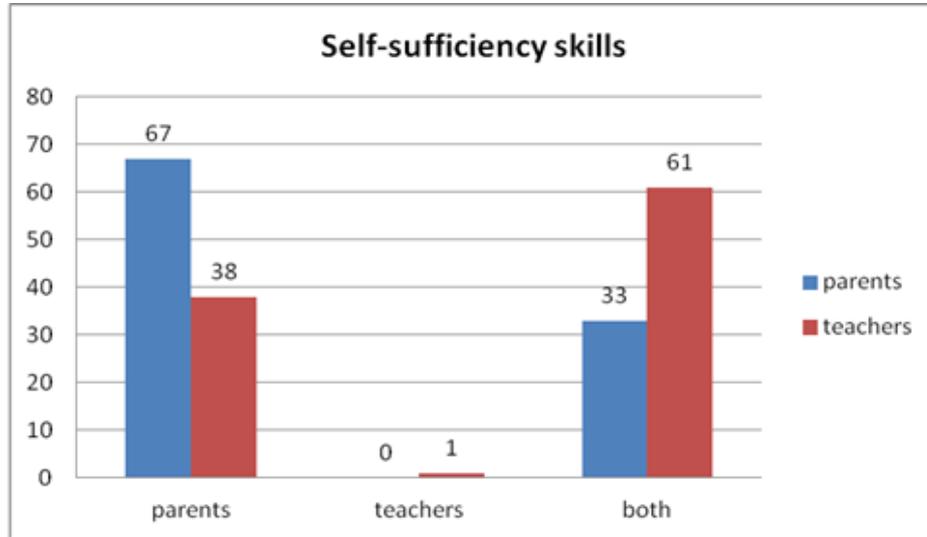
**Figure 4.** Frequency percentages of parents' and teachers' responses for gross-motor skills

Figure 5 and Figure 6 show the percentages of parents' and teachers' responses in the area of self-expression and self-sufficiency skills. Sixty-two percent of teachers considered themselves to be solely responsible for developing these skills. Thirty-eight percent of teachers and 70% of parents' believed that the responsibility should be shared.

Neither parents nor teachers considered teachers alone to be responsible for developing children's self-sufficiency skills. Thirty-three percent of parents and 61% of teachers see it as a shared responsibility. However, 67% of parents considered themselves to be primarily responsible and 38% of teachers agreed with them.

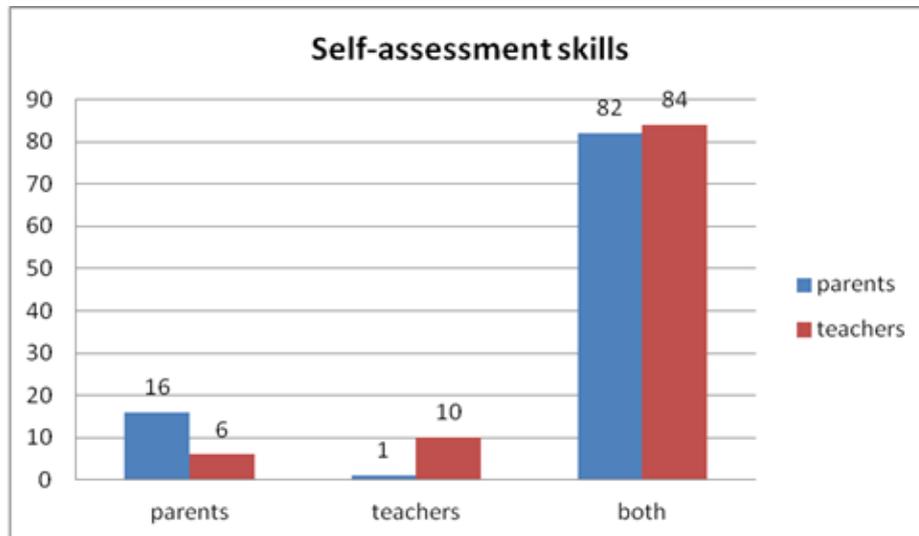


**Figure 5.** Frequency percentages of parents' and teachers' responses for self-expression skills

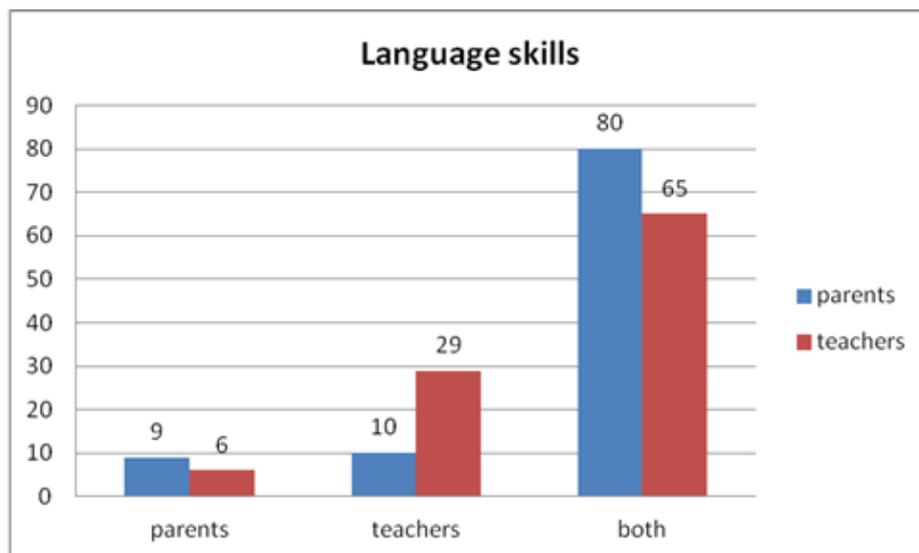


**Figure 6.** Frequency percentages of parents' and teachers' responses for self-sufficiency skills

Eighty-two percent of parents and 84% of teachers indicated that both parents and teachers should share the responsibility for developing children's self-assessment skills. Eighty percent of parents and 65% of teachers indicated that the responsibility for developing language skills should also be shared, but 29% of the teachers claimed that this is solely a teacher's responsibility. (Figure 7 and Figure 8)



**Figure 7.** Frequency percentages of parents' and teachers' responses for self-assessment skills



**Figure 8.** Frequency percentages of parents' and teachers' responses for language skills

*Parents' and Teachers' Expectations of the Child's Preschool Curriculum*

Parents and teachers ranked ten statements regarding their expectations of a preschool curriculum, using a scale of 1 (most important) to 10 (least important). The three most important statements and the three least important were identified by frequency percentages. Also, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to see if one group's rankings of any of the statements were significantly higher or lower than the other group's rankings.

Table 2 shows the frequency percentages of the top and bottom three responses related to curriculum. As seen in Table 2, 64% of parents and 90% of teachers placed the statement "The preschool curriculum should allow children to learn things by themselves" among the top three choices. Fifty percent of parents ranked the statement "The preschool curriculum should encourage children to be curious about the world and to ask questions" among the first three choices, 47% of teachers agreed. The statement "The preschool curriculum should be flexible enough to meet each child's learning needs" was also considered to be important: 50% of parents and 51% of teachers listed the statement in their first three choices.

**Table 2.** Parents and teachers top and bottom three responses regarding their expectations of curriculum

Parents	%	Teachers	%
<b>Top 3 curriculum features</b>			
Learning things by himself/herself	64	Learning things by himself/herself	90
Encouraging children to be curious	50	Meeting each child's learning needs	51
Meeting each child's learning needs	50	Encouraging children to be curious	47
<b>Bottom 3 curriculum features</b>			
Provide information on sex	81	Provide information on religion	97
Provide information on religion	77	Provide information on Turkish values	69
Provide information on Turkish values	64	Provide information on sex	60

Among the other items not presented in the table, Learning through play, music, and art was considered to be important by both parents and teachers. Parental opinions concerning the importance of English lessons in the preschool curriculum were mixed; generally, learning English was not considered to be a high priority by parents or by teachers. The statement "The preschool curriculum should encourage children to learn things from doing group projects" was considered to be of moderate importance by parents and teachers. Interestingly, "The preschool curriculum should be focused on arithmetic, writing, and reading" was also given moderate importance.

Identified as unimportant by both parents and teachers was the need to answer children's questions about sex, religion, and Turkish values (Table 2). However, the related percentages differed somewhat. While 97% of teachers considered the provision of religious information to be the least important component of a curriculum, only 77% of parents agreed with them. Eighty-one percent of parents indicated that sex education

does not have a place in the preschool curriculum, and 60 % of teachers agreed. The statement "The preschool curriculum should provide information about Turkish values" was also ranked low, by 64% of parents and 69% of teachers.

#### *Parents' and Teachers' Expectations of Preschool Teachers*

Parents and teachers were asked to prioritize ten statements denoting the qualities and characteristics of a preschool teacher. Table 3 shows frequency percentages of the three top-ranked and three bottom-ranked statements. Fifty-three percent of parents and 59% of teachers put the statement "The preschool teacher should have an appropriate education (university degree)" among their first three choices.

Parents and teachers tended to agree that "The preschool teacher should be patient and compassionate with children"; 46% of parents ranked this statement highest, and 51% of the teachers ranked it among their top three choices. They also agreed that "The preschool teacher should be aware of and respect the individual differences in children"; this statement was ranked in the top three by 53% of the parents and 44% of the teachers.

**Table 3.** Parents and teachers top and bottom three responses regarding their expectations of teachers

Parents	%	Teachers	%
<b>Top 3 teacher characteristics</b>			
Have an appropriate education	53	Have an appropriate education	59
Respect individual differences	53	Be patient/compassionate with children	51
Be patient/compassionate with children	46	Respect individual differences	44
<b>Bottom 3 teacher characteristics</b>			
Set firm rules in the classroom	62	Keep a detailed record of each child's progress and inform parents in this regard	72
Extend his/her professional knowledge by attending seminars, and workshops	48	Set firm rules in the classroom	54
Keep a detailed record of each child's progress and inform parents in this regard	38	Develop good relationships with parents	48

The importance of a good teaching record and long experience was not clear from the responses of parents and teachers. While some parents and teachers valued experience, others considered it to be unimportant. Teachers and parents gave a moderate importance to the statement "The preschool teacher should be open new developments in the field of education and try new strategies." That "The preschool teacher should have an interest and capacity for teaching" was considered moderately important by both groups.

Among the least important characteristics of the preschool teacher, according to parents and teachers alike, was "setting firm rules in the classroom" (parents 62%, teachers 54%) and "keeping a detailed record of child's progress and informing parents." (parents 38%, teachers 72%). It is interesting to see that teachers consider assessment as being not important. Another lesser importance given by teachers is to developing good relationships with parents (48%). Parents did not consider professional development of teachers as important (48%).

#### *Parents' and Teachers' Expectations of the Preschool Environment*

Parents and teachers were asked to prioritize ten statements of the preschool environment which they think as important. Table 4 shows the frequency percentages of the three top-ranked and three bottom-ranked statements. Considering the three top-ranked statements, a clean and healthy environment is a must for 85% of the parents and 88% of the teachers. Safety also ranked high among parents and teachers; 52% of parents and 62% of teachers selected a safe environment to be one of their top three priorities.

Teachers identified the statement "The preschool environment should have a good balance between the number of teachers and number of students" as the most important characteristic of a preschool environment, 60% of the teachers placing this among their top three choices compared to 44% of the parents.

Teachers placed the statement, "The preschool should have an appropriate and adequate number of toys, books, and materials" in the second, third, and fourth position, whereas, many parents ranked this item as very important or moderately important. Both groups considered the statements "The preschool should have a doctor and other health staff available in case of emergency" and "The preschool should have an adequate and trained staff" to be moderately important, along with healthful and nutritious food.

Seventy-five percent of parents clearly indicated that having a playground in a preschool environment is not very important, 49% placing it last in their order of priorities which means that teachers more or less agreed with them. Seventy-seven percent of teachers ranked the statement "The preschool should have an adequate number of computers for children's use" as the least important issue in a preschool environment as did 59% of parents. 58% of parents and teachers put "Provision of special activities such as ballet, swimming, and folk-dancing" last in their priority list.

**Table 4.** Parents and teachers top and bottom three responses regarding their expectations of environment

Parents	%	Teachers	%
<b>Top 3 environment features</b>			
Provide a clean and healthy environment	85	Provide a clean and healthy environment	88
Provide close supervision of children for their physical safety	52	Provide close supervision of children for their physical safety	62
Have a good balance between the number of teachers and students	44	Have a good balance between the number of teachers and students	60
<b>Bottom 3 environment features</b>			
Have a playground for outdoor activities	75	Have adequate number of computers available for children's use	77
Have adequate number of computers available for children's use	59	Provide special activities	58
Provide special activities	58	Have a playground for outdoor activities	49

Finally, The Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the ranking decisions of parents and teachers. Table 5 shows the resulting means, order of mean ranking, U values, and levels of significance.

Concerning the curriculum, the teachers ranked the statements "Allow children to learn things by themselves" ( $U = 2762, p = .003$ ) and "Provide information on basic questions regarding sex" significantly higher than the parents ranked them ( $U = 3041, p = .02$ ). The parents ranked "Provide English lessons" ( $U = 2979, p = .01$ ) and "Provide information on basic questions regarding religion" higher than teachers ranked them ( $U = 2767, p = .003$ ).

Concerning teachers, the teachers ranked the "Be open to new developments in the field of education and try new things" significantly higher than parents ranked it ( $U = 3039, p = .02$ ). The parents ranked "Keep record on child's progress and inform parents in this regard" higher than the teachers ranked it ( $U = 2179, p = .001$ ).

**Table 5.** Mann-Whitney U Test values comparing parents' and teachers' ratings of expectations of preschool curriculum, teachers, and environment

	Parents		Teachers		U value	P Level
	Mean rank	Order of mean	Mean rank	Order of mean		
Allow children learn things by themselves	3.15	1	1.84	1	2762.0	.003
Consist of English lessons for children	5.45	6	6.62	7	2979.0	.017
Provide information on some basic questions regarding sex	8.00	9	7.56	8	3041.5	.022
Provide information on some basic questions on religion	8.36	10	9.37	10	2767.5	.003
Be open new developments in the field of education	4.85	4	3.84	2	3039.0	.026
Keep record of each child's progress and inform parents	6.35	8	8.31	10	2179.5	.000
Have appropriate and adequate number of books, toys	5.22	5	4.06	4	2821.0	.013
Have adequate number of computers	7.42	9	8.35	10	2884.0	.018
Have a playground supplemented with equipment	8.44	10	7.61	8	2775.0	.007

Concerning the preschool environment, the teachers ranked "Having adequate toys, books, and materials" ( $U = 2821$ ,  $p = .01$ ) and "Having a playground" significantly higher than the parents ranked them ( $U = 2775$ ,  $p = .007$ ). The parents ranked "Provisions of computers in preschool environment" higher than the teachers ranked it ( $U = 2884$ ,  $p = .01$ ).

### Discussion

Many of the participating parents and teachers held the expectation that the teaching of developmental skills is a joint responsibility shared by parents and teachers. Their expectations also indicated that the teaching of social skills with adults and self-sufficiency skills is mainly the responsibility of parents, and that the teaching of academic skills, self expression skills, and gross-motor skills is mainly the responsibility of teachers. Self-sufficiency skills include the accomplishment of personal care such as toilet training that children should have learned prior to their entrance into preschool. The opinion that self-sufficiency and social skills with adults are parental responsibilities may be related more to family values and culture rather than to expectations of schools. In Turkish culture, it is a parent's duty to teach manners,

respect for adults, and obedience; generally speaking, parents whose children do not behave themselves receive the censure of other adults.

Judging by their responses, teachers consider their major duty to be teaching academic skills, gross-motor skills, and self-expression skills. It is not surprising that teachers believe they are better equipped than parents to teach these skills. First, this is their job, and second, the variety of materials available in schools makes it easier and more appropriate to teach these skills in the classroom. Considering the development of gross-motor skills, teachers may think of themselves as the responsible because many children will have few opportunities for gross motor activity in their neighborhoods. However, it is therefore surprising that teachers did not see the need for a play area in their preschool environment. Indeed, both parents and teachers placed provisions for outdoor play among the lowest of their priorities. It was not surprising then to discover that three of the participating preschools did not have a playground or any other gross motor equipment.

The teaching of social skills with peers and self-assessment skills was seen as a shared responsibility. Developing language skills was also seen as a shared responsibility, although some teachers assumed greater responsibility in this area. Schools offer children the opportunity to interact with other children, to develop reasoning and conversational skills as they develop peer relationships. Such interaction can also take place outside school, of course, and therefore teachers and parents share the responsibility.

A research study conducted in Turkey by Sagmanli (1999) found similar results. That investigation examined the opinions of mothers and teachers regarding responsibility for skills development. The researcher asked parents and teachers to rank the three most important skills that they believed were their own group's responsibility and which were the responsibility of the other group. She found that mothers and teachers agreed that mothers should be responsible for developing self-sufficiency skills and social skills. In another investigation (Weikart, 1999), teachers' and parents' opinions were collected in fifteen different countries. The teachers identified the development of social skills with peers, language skills, academic skills, and self-expression skills as their responsibility. Parents considered the development of self-sufficiency skills and social skills with adults to be their responsibility. That these findings are consistent with the findings of the current study means that there are internationally shared views of parents' and teachers' responsibilities.

In this study parents and teachers tended to have similar opinions on what characteristics of the curriculum, the teacher, and the environment are important. It was important for parents that a preschool curriculum should allow children to learn things by themselves, should encourage children be curious and to ask questions, and should meet children's individual needs. Teachers also valued these characteristics of the preschool curriculum, but they placed rather more importance on task-oriented skill development. Because of the emphasis on education in Turkish culture, parents and teachers feel that one of the biggest responsibilities is to help children to succeed in school. Teachers believe that the preschool curriculum should teach academic skills so that the children are well equipped to meet the demands of first grade.

When curriculum ideas of parents and teachers are considered, seeing that both groups valuing Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) gives some hope for the

future of ECEC area. Encouraging children to be curious, addressing personal needs of children, and giving freedom to children to be responsible for their learning are the characteristics of DAP. However, several studies in the field points out the lack of connections between beliefs and practices. Varol (2012) found in her study that practices valued verbally by teachers were rarely seen in actual classrooms. Varol (2012) stated that the skills are taught from worksheets rather than from hands-on-learning experiences. Moreover, the worksheet activities were pre-structured and teacher-directed. The children were treated as a single whole-class group; reading a book was accomplished while they sat at their desks. Gol-Guven (2009) also addressed the issue in her study that although in the official documents of the national policy of ECEC in Turkey state DAP standards, it is hard to capture the reflections of DAP in the real classrooms.

Neither parents nor teachers not want issues of sex, religion, and cultural values to be featured in the preschool curriculum. Perhaps they think that these concepts are too abstract for children to understand. Nevertheless, the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MNE) requires preschools to teach Turkish values. The MNE expects schools to celebrate national events and holidays so that children gain an understanding of their culture and identity.

The provision of English lessons in the curriculum was not a priority of parents. In contrast, a new policy of the MNE says that children should start learning English in preschool, although the policy is not yet implemented. Typically, private preschools in Turkey do provide English lessons, which they consider to be an appealing factor in the competition for students. The practice is consistent with a worldwide trend to start the learning of a foreign language at a very early age. However, English lessons were not seen as a high priority by this group of Turkish parents.

In this study, in the opinion of parents and teachers, having a degree in early childhood education was the most desired characteristic of teachers. MNE is currently working on a project intended to increase the number of preschool teachers graduating from universities by opening new departments in the universities. The general public and educational administrators all agree that the quality of Turkish education can be increased by having better educated teachers in preschool classrooms. For the parents and the teachers in this study, teachers with a university degree seemed to be more important than teachers with years of experience. Research also supports this position; teachers who have a degree are more likely to employ developmentally appropriate practices in their classrooms (Essa & Burnham, 2001). However, before recruiting more students in early childhood education, the government's first step must be increasing the number of instructors in the universities. The quality of degree programs must be protected. Without sufficient personnel and necessary resources in the Faculties of Education, increasing the numbers of students might do more harm than good.

Communication between home and school is recognized by national educational organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as an important factor that helps children's adaptation to school and fosters academic success. However, the findings of this study suggest that communication between parents and teachers is not of high priority for these parents and teachers. According to their choice of priorities, keeping a record of each child's progress, informing parents, and developing good relationships with parents are not highly valued

practices of preschool teachers. However, another study conducted in Turkish preschools showed that parents can be involved and believe when involved that their involvement adds a value of their children's education (Tekin, 2011).

The findings of the current study related to desired characteristics of an ECEC teacher are somewhat contradicted with the findings of Kucukturan's (2011) study. For example, the current study revealed that parents do not give much of an importance to professional development but in Kucukturan's study parents stated that participating in seminars and reading publications are important. Evaluation seemed to be a big part of parents' expectations of teachers in Kucukturan's study, where as in the present study keeping records of development and communicating the results with parents was placed in the very end of teachers' rankings. The methodological issues might have created those conflicting results. Kucukturan used interviews in which the possibilities of listing as many traits as possible, on the contrary this study forced the participants to make their first and indispensable choices.

Both parents and teachers placed computers and special activities at the bottom of their list of expectations of a preschool environment. Nevertheless, many preschools, especially private preschools, provide lessons in English, computer, ballet, chess, folk dance, gymnastics, swimming, and other activities. Meanwhile, parental concerns are focused on essential basics such as health and safety. If these parents felt that their children's needs for health and safety were met in the public schools, perhaps the extra activities would rise in their list of priorities.

### Conclusion

Enrollment in a preschool is not enough to ensure that children receive a good education. The buildings and technology do not create an environment that is functional and attractive for children. Many children in Istanbul live in high-rise buildings or in densely populated neighborhoods of illegally built houses (gecekondu), which means that they do not have the opportunity for outdoor or even for indoor play. Provision of gross-motor equipment for outdoor and indoor activities should be made available in preschools. Yet, parents and teachers in this study have not prioritized having a playground in schools. Sadly, only three of the six participating preschools even had a playground.

The findings of this study suggest that a university degree is considered to be sufficient to ensure the quality of a preschool teacher. However, teachers also need to attend seminars and workshops to update their current knowledge and improve their practice. Being open to new developments is a desirable characteristic. However, informal interviews revealed that teachers in the participating preschools could not obtain the wherewithal to attend in-service workshops and seminars.

The importance of parental involvement in early childhood education is widely accepted. Research indicates that parental involvement requires frequent interaction between teachers and parents, which in turn can help children to succeed (Honig, 1979; Karakus & Savas, 2012). Hence, preschool principals should provide ample opportunities for parents to be involved. More importantly, teachers should encourage parents and find ways to enlist their support in their children's education.

As in many nations, supporting children's development, helping them acquire healthy habits, preparing them for primary education, and providing safe and healthy environments are among the objectives of ECEC in Turkey. The standards and indicators of quality proposed by researchers point to these features of ECEC. For instance, Koralek, Colker, and Dodge (1995) described high-quality ECEC services as being built on an understanding of child development, meeting the needs of each child, providing a variety of activities and materials, ensuring children's active involvement, and showing respect for each child's needs and ideas. While this current study shows that parents' and teachers' expectations are consistent with the state's objectives and the proposals resulting from research, the challenge of achieving all the goals for Turkish preschools is huge. Thus it is important to bring a broader international understanding to this specific cultural context. Otherwise the practices that serve the wellbeing of children may never be realized.

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### Özüne Dönme: Ebeveynler ve Öğretmenler Erken Çocukluk Eğitimi ve Bakımından Neler Beklemektedirler

#### Özet

*Erken Çocukluk Eğitimi ve Bakımı (EÇEB) alanındaki gelişmeler, sınıflarda akademik ağırlıklı kararların daha fazla alınmasına yol açmıştır. Bu yaklaşımın olumlu çıktıları olmasına karşın, akademinin ebeveyn ve öğretmen düşünceleri ve beklentilerini bir kenara bırakması bir sorun olarak görülebilmektedir. Bu araştırmanın amacı, ebeveynlerin ve öğretmenlerin "çocuklar için ne istediklerinin" tekrardan araştırma konularına dahil edilmesini sağlamaktır. Bu amaçla, 286 ebeveyn ve kırk yedi anaokulu öğretmeninden bir anket doldurmaları istenmiştir. Ankette, ebeveyn ve öğretmenlerin, erken çocukluk eğitimi ve bakımı yürüten kurumlardan beklentilerini ve çocukların hayatındaki rollerinin ne olması gerektiği ile ilgili düşüncelerini içeren ifadeler mevcuttur. Bulgular, ebeveynlerin öz-bakım ve yetişkinlerle ilişki kurma becerilerinin daha fazla kendi sorumlulukları olduğunu, öğretmenlerin akademik, kendini ifade etme ve büyük kas (kaba motor) becerilerinin gelişimine destek olmakta sorumlu olduklarını düşündüklerini göstermiştir. Ebeveynler ve öğretmenler, anaokulu müfredatının, çocukların kendi kendine bir şeyler öğrenmesine fırsat tanıyıcı, çocukların merak etme ve soru sormalarını teşvik edici ve her bir çocuğun öğrenme ihtiyacını karşılayıcı özelliklere sahip olması gerektiğini ifade etmişlerdir. Okullarda, kültür ve bağlamda anlamlı olan deneyimlerin çocuklara sunulabilmesi için ebeveyn ve öğretmenlerin düşünce ve beklentilerini anlamak önemlidir. Bu anlamda çalışmanın, Türkiye'deki erken çocukluk eğitimi ve bakımı politika ve uygulamalarını geliştirmede yardımcı olması beklenmektedir.*

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* Erken Çocukluk Eğitimi ve Bakımı (EÇEB), Ebeveyn ve Öğretmen Rollerini ve Beklentileri, Çevre.

