

Turkish Early Childhood Educators' Conceptualization About Parental Involvement

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Summary: The purpose of this study is to find out Turkish early childhood educators' views about parental involvement and their attitudes towards its types. Based on Epstein's parental involvement frameworks, four different types of parental involvement was used in this study and these are communication, volunteer works, home support and decision making. Furthermore this reseach also aims to find the reasons behind inefficient usage of parental involvement types. For these purposes the relationship between parental involvement and the backgrounds of educators such as education level and teaching experience in the field is also investigated. Data was collected in capital of Turkey with questionnaires prepared by the reseacher. 113 early childhood educators participated in the study. Quantitative analysis were done to find the associations between parental involvement and the backgrounds of educators such as education level and teaching experience in the field. Results indicate that the Turkish early childhood educators have positive attitudes towards parental involvement and its types. Additionally the most popular parental involvement type is home support while the least popular one is involving parents in decision-making process. According to the results, Turkish early childhood educators' views about parental involvement and the parental involvement types they use do not correlate with the years they spend in the teaching fields and their education level. However the usage of parental involvement types correlates with themselves. Finally the main reason of unefficient usage of parental involvement is that parents seem not willing to participate in parental involvement activities in Turkey. For further studies, parents' views about parental involvement would be enlightening.

Keywords: Parental involvement, Teacher opinions, Parental involvement types, Early childhood education.

*To my Lovely Parents...*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The research conducted through last three decades show that parental involvement has a significant role on children's academic achievement as well as their cognitive, social and emotional development. Also these researches have emphasized parental involvement as particularly important aspect of school-home relationship, which effects children's education (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

The opinions of teachers as one of the main facets of education have significant implications on parental involvement applications, therefore the purpose of this study is to investigate the perspectives of Turkish early childhood educators about parental involvement and their attitudes towards types of parental involvement, which are specified in this study as communication, home support, volunteer work and decision making (Epstein, 2001). These parental involvement types can be described briefly as communication that covers every kind of communication between school and family concerning the child and school-related manners; home support includes all kinds of school-related activities done by parents with their children at home; volunteer work is the sum of participation of parents in school activities voluntarily; and decision making is involving parents in decision-making process of school-related subjects.

Furthermore, this research aims to find answers why specific types of parental involvement are not used efficiently. Mattingly, Prislín, McKenzie, Rodriguez and Kayzar (2002) claim that the quality relationship between families and schools has great importance in the last three decades, and parental involvement plays a particularly significant role in the family-school relationship and influences children's education. As Mattingly et al. state, parental involvement has a positive influence on children's academic success; as well empowering the parents (as cited in Akkök, 1999). Since parental involvement is such an important component of education, it is worth investigating the thoughts of teachers, who can be considered as the main source of formal education, about involving parents in the curriculum.

Although it seems like parental involvement is more likely to be the duty of an educational institution, specifically of teachers, in fact, national educational policy plays a major role in this process. According to Akkök (1999) in the Turkish education system, the importance of parental involvement has recently been recognized, which means parental involvement has only about 20 years of history in the Turkish education

system and which is really a short history for an 89 year-old republic. Considering that there are many teachers still working in the field, who have been working over 20 years, this can also be thought of as a new concept for education. Therefore, it is of interest to find out how teachers, who have varied experiences and come from different backgrounds, apply parental involvement types in their programs.

Another motivation behind this research is that I, the researcher, have worked as a kindergarten teacher and a senior member of administration for one year and had a chance to observe the importance of parental involvement in early childhood education and how it is applied in preschools. In fact, during university education, it is taught that the parents are one of the legs of a table, which represents the child, and the other legs are the teacher, the school and the community. To make a perfect table, every one of these legs must be of the same length and strength, and only in this way one can the table be made to be more complex and beautiful than it was at the beginning. No doubt, making the table stronger is the job of all four legs. On the other hand, reality may not work in the way it is taught of a university. Therefore, this study is considered as the first step of understanding how applications are supposed to be and how they are in reality of the subject of parental involvement in Turkey specifically.

In this study, the relationship between early childhood educators' teaching experience and their thoughts about parental involvement is investigated in addition to the relationship between their teaching experience and the parental involvement types they use. In this way it may be possible to see if there is a relationship between the development of parental involvement in the Turkish education system and teachers' applications because there participants with different levels of teaching experience in this work. Furthermore the relationship between the education level of the participants and their opinions about parental involvement is studied, while the relationship between their education level and the parental involvement types they use is investigated.

With the results of this study, a new window would open to take a deeper look at parental involvement approaches in the Turkish education system since it seems to be fairly basic research in the area to understand the dynamics of general opinions of Turkish early childhood educators on parental involvement and their usage of parental involvement types.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Parental Involvement and Its Importance

Parents are the first teachers of children from the first day of their existence and considering lifelong learning, they will be teachers, academic counsellors and mentors during their child's life. Before formal education starts, basic information about life in general is gained with the help of the parents; therefore it is hard to deny the significant importance of their role in children's education (Berger, 2008). When a parent reads the first book, answers the very first question of their child about the world, education starts for the young one. Even after formal education has started, the importance of parents in this process does not decrease; on the contrary it increases. Many educational studies show the importance of parental involvement in the school curriculum on students' academic achievement and motivation (Coleman, 2009).

As Uludağ (2008) defines, parental involvement is "parent and teacher collaboration on children's learning" (p.809). It means that there is a mutual exchange of information about the child between parent and teacher. Stacey states that in addition to work collaboratively, parental involvement is not only sharing information, but it also means that parents and teachers are equal on the basis of division of authority, which allows parents to be a part of the decision-making process. (as cited in Morrow & Malin, 2004). According to Hill and Taylor (2004), there are mainly two reasons why parental involvement has a positive influence on children's academic achievement, which can be considered as combining the parental involvement definitions of Uludağ (2008) and Stacey (1991) (as cited in Morrow & Malin, 2004). These reasons are (a) being in an environment where parents can learn from each other and from teachers; and (b) building up a common understanding about appropriate behaviours for the children in the school and in the house. In this case, parents and teachers work together while sharing information and agreeing on goals and strategies they will follow to increase the potential of the children.

For such cooperation, mutual respect and open communication are supposed to be established. With a common interest in children's development, parents, teachers and the school organization should respect each other's opinions to prevent possible tensions arising from the differences between thoughts; then, clear communication comes into prominence (Driessen, Smit & Slegers, 2005).

Additionally, the results of parental involvement have more of an interactive effect, which means that, while it affects children's learning and development, it is also affected by this positive change. Gonzales-DeHass, Willems and Holbein (2005) mention that, with the rising success of children, the motivation of parents to be involved in curriculum also increases. In this way, collaboration feeds on itself and increases the positive effects on children's academic achievement and motivation.

Since the family plays a great role on the child's cognitive, emotional and social development, and collaborative work with parents has such an important effect on children's academic success, there should be well-established cooperation between the school and families. To be able to work as partners, administration, teachers and parents should work together. As a start, the school climate comes to consideration (Berger, 2008). According to Berger (2008) a welcoming climate should be established by the school to comfort parents when they step into school instead of a feeling which tells them to stay away from teachers' territory. The encouragement of home-school interaction coming from teachers is also associated with the competence among parents at their parental involvement level (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

Beside of the school spirit, parents' past experiences, cultural values and feelings affects the shape of the relationship between school and home (Berger, 2008). Baker and Stevenson (1986) mention that, besides parental characteristics, demographic characteristics such as socioeconomic status, cultural background and ethnicity are associated with parental involvement dynamics. Additionally, parents from high socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to attend the school activities and follow their children's development more closely than the ones with lower socioeconomic status.

Apart from those factors, parents' psychological state influences their involvement. Depression and anxiety disorders can be listed as the examples of conditions affecting psychological states. According to the research of Hill and Taylor (2004), depressed mothers are less involved in their children's school life than nondepressed one. This includes both home- and school-based parental involvement, such as preparing the child for school and attending school activities.

Additionally Taylor, Clayton and Rowley (2004) claim that parents' own experiences about school have an impact on their attitudes towards parental involvement. Good and relaxing memories of their school time lead the parents to interact with their children's

school. On the other hand, if they have stressful memories, this can cause them to avoid contacting their children's school.

As a result of all these factors affecting the quality of parental involvement, to build a healthy relationship between school and home becomes a delicate issue. Tying up these two social environments to provide full support for children's development is both schools' and families' mission. A warm and welcoming climate provided by the school and a compromising attitude exhibited by the parents would be the first solid steps towards this important supportive cooperation.

## **2.2. Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Education**

Although there have been some major changes in the role of parents during the 20th century, they have been a part of education from past to present. By the middle of the 20th century, there was a strict division of roles between schools and parents. Schools were only responsible for academic issues while parents were focusing on social aspects (Hill & Taylor, 2004). On the other hand, despite this general idea of sharing roles, after World War II a change started in early childhood education; this change emerged from the need for effective education and care for the children in a post-war world. In Italy, specifically in Reggio, a new educational movement started under the leadership of Loris Malaguzzi. In this curriculum, parents are considered as one of the three main components of education. As second and third components, art teachers and classroom teachers share responsibility with parents equally. Both teachers and parents work together as a team and the children are at the centre of the whole education process. This curriculum has been used since then and it is one good example in the area. (Berger, 2008)

Especially considering the children's need for care in the early childhood period, it is a necessity for teachers to work with parents as partners (Morrow & Malin, 2004). According to the findings of The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project (UK, 2004) a good quality early childhood education combined with home learning affects children's social and cognitive development positively. Moreover, with a curriculum which includes the parents in the decision-making process makes a positive difference in children's intellectual gains. As a result, it can be concluded that a high level of parental involvement has a great positive influence on children's development at early ages. The results also show that the children, who receive parental support in their education, tend to need less special education.

Parental involvement in early childhood education not only affects pupils' development, but also it influences teachers, families and the program itself. Çakmak (2010) explains that with parent interaction the effectiveness of a program could be investigated and the necessary adjustments can be done according to feedbacks from parents. Also any kinds of contributions coming from the parents would enrich the program. For example with presenting his/her profession or hobbies, parent would support the program positively. Also including parents in school-related decisions helps to strengthen the program according to the needs of families (Çakmak, 2010).

Apart from the effects of parents on programs, parental involvement has also good outcomes for parents. With supporting their children's' education at home and participating school activities, parents gain the chance to develop a better understanding about children's' education and teachers' duties. This helps them to develop a positive view on early childhood education which leads them to support their children more and more. (Çakmak, 2010)

Finally with a well applied parental involvement, teachers would be well supported by the parents and this would help them to give children more individual care. The more parents involve in the program, the more they give their support to teachers. (Çakmak, 2010)

To sum up, parental involvement in early childhood education has positive influence on pupils' cognitive, social and emotional development. While supporting children's development, it also helps to enrich the program and relieves teachers' burden. Additionally it gives parents the opportunity of understanding the early childhood education, while supporting their children's development.

### **2.3. Early Childhood Education in Turkey**

In the pre-republic period, "Sıbyan Mektepleri" can be recognized as the first early childhood educational institutions in Turkish history. In these schools, children between the ages of 5-6 were educated in writing, reading the Qur'an and praying. The aim of these schools was taking care of the children, nurturing and protecting them; on the other hand, supporting the development of the children was not their consideration. (Çelik & Gündoğdu, 2007). During the second constitutional monarchy period, private kindergartens (ana mektepleri) and after the Balkan Wars, official kindergartens were opened. On 6th October, 1913, with the third, fourth and fifth parts of the temporary elementary education law (Tedrisatı İptidaiye Kanunu Muvakkati), kindergartens were

accepted as a part of elementary education and it was decided to open them in every city in the country. (Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency, 2009/2010).

During the first year of the republic, the main focus was on teaching the new alphabet, so every citizen could read and write. This massive education movement needed a great deal of funding, and as a result, the money reserved for early childhood education decreased. In the end, early childhood educational institutions were left to the municipalities and they were shut down one by one; however, for the children of working mothers, who cannot afford a nanny, child-care centres were opened in the 1930s. At the same time as all public kindergartens were shut down, private kindergartens were opened. (Oğuzkan & Oral, 2003; Oktay, 1983 as cited in Çelik & Gündoğdu, 2007).

After almost 20 years of break, early childhood education started to gain importance on the governmental level again. In the report which was prepared for the VII. National Education Council in 1962, information about early childhood institutions in foreign countries and some statistical information about early childhood education were presented. Additionally, the need for early childhood educators, helpers and early childhood institutions or nursery classes was mentioned. After this council, new regulations about “Kindergartens and Nursery Classes” were published under the “Elementary Education Law” (222 sayılı İlk Öğretim ve Eğitim Kanunu) and early childhood education was spread by both public and private institutions. (Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency, 2009/2010 and Oğuzkan & Oral, 2003 as cited in Çelik & Gündoğdu, 2007 and).

Although the curriculum and the system have not been settled yet, certain aims are mentioned in national law (General Law of National Education, 20th article). According to this law, early childhood education should support children’s physical, emotional and cognitive development and help them gain good habits. Besides the developmental aspects, during early childhood education, the language skills of children should be supported and teachers should help children to speak Turkish correctly and beautifully. As a part of social skills, another aim of early childhood education is to help children gain behaviour such as respect, cooperation, responsibility, help, solidarity and sharing. Other than these behaviours, children should also develop creative and critical thinking abilities learn how to express their imagination, emotions and how to communicate. In addition to supporting children development, early childhood education should also create a common nurturing environment for children from disadvantaged environments

and families. The final goal of early childhood education is to prepare children for elementary school. (Early Childhood Education Institutions Regulations, 6<sup>th</sup> Article, as cited in Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency, 2009/2010)

Age groups and early childhood education institutions are also defined by Early Childhood Education Institutions Regulations;

**Table 2.3 Early childhood institutions according to age groups**

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Early Childhood Education Institution</b>
0-36 months-old	Crèches
36-72 months-old	Kindergartens
36-72 months-old	“Practical” nursery classes*
60-72 months-old	Preschool classes in primary schools**

\*These classes are a part of vocational high schools; students from these high schools do their practical training in them

\*\*nursery classes

(as cited in UNESCO, 2006 and Education, Audio-visual & Culture Executive Agency, 2009/2010)

Teachers of early childhood classes must graduate from four-year higher education programme in child development or early childhood education, and trained educators must graduate from vocational high school with a degree of child development (UNESCO, 2006). Also if it is desired, teachers may have a master’s degree for a higher salary. Additionally, with an associate degree in a related subject, it is possible to become a contract status trainer (National Education Basic Law No. 1739).

During its history, early childhood education developed in Turkey both at the public and the private level. However, according to Derman and Başal (2010), this development is not enough to keep up with foreign countries because the enrolment rate is still too low compared with the other countries. They also claim that the quality of early childhood education in Turkey is not adequate.

According to the percentages shown in OECD reports, the enrolment rate of the pupils younger than 5 years old is really low in Turkey; as a matter of fact, Turkey comes last

on the chart (OECD, 2010). UNESCO (2006) reports that the early childhood education enrolment rate is 10.7% in Turkey, based on 2004/05 statistics. In the following table, further early childhood education statistics are shown.

**Table 2.4 Early Childhood Education Statistics in Turkey**

	2000-01	2005-06	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Number of Children	227.464	550.146	701.762	804.765	980.654
Boys	119.821	286.347	366.209	421.033	511.127
Girls	107.643	263.799	335.553	383.732	469.527
School enrolment rate (36-72 months) (%)	5,38	13,41	17,71	20,61	26,92
Boys	5,57	13,12	18,10	21,11	27,34
Girls	5,19	13,69	17,29	20,08	26,48
School enrolment rate (48-72monts) (%)	..	18,83	25,23	29,06	26,92
Boys	..	19,24	25,82	29,79	27,34
Girls	..	18,41	24,62	28,3	26,48
Number of Teachers	11.896	20.910	25.901	29.342	42.716
Men	166	1.167	1.218	1.644	2.069
Women	11.730	19.743	24.683	27.698	40.647
Number of Trained Educators	-	12.116	16.068	18.291	-
Number of children per teacher	19,12	26,31	28,43	27,43	22,96
Number of Schools	8.255	18.539	22.506	23.653	26.681

(as cited in Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency, 2009/2010)

As can be seen in the table, the number of students who enrolled in an early childhood education institution has increased and the enrolment rate of boys and girls are quite in balance. The number of teachers has also increased over time; however, there is a huge difference between female and male teachers because it can easily be said that early childhood education is not a popular profession among males in Turkey. The number of schools has also increased in ten years; however, the child: teacher ratio has also

increased. According to statistics, the ratio is almost 23 children per teacher in 2009/10, which might affect the quality of the education negatively.

Besides formal early childhood education settings, there are some special projects which aim to improve early childhood education in Turkey. These projects are administered by the Ministry of Education and other civil associations. For example, the “Early Childhood Parent-Child Training Program” and the “Summer School Project” have been developed by the Ministry of Education and the Mother-Child Education Foundation (AÇEV). Mostly the aim of these projects is to reach children who are from disadvantaged environments and families. In this way, it is aimed to spread early childhood education throughout the country. As examples of these projects; the “Mobile Kindergarten Project” is an outstanding project. For this Project, old busses have been renovated as kindergartens on wheels; in this way early childhood education goes to the pupils instead of vice versa. In addition to the projects targeting children with disadvantaged background, there are some other projects which aim to supporting the quality of education in schools such as the “Strengthening Pre-School Education Grant Program”, and to strengthen the link between home and school the “My Home School Project”. Furthermore, there are some projects which focus on the physical side of early childhood education. Under these projects, new schools have been built, old schools have been renovated and new equipment has been given. The “ABCDE My Future Is in My Hands Project” is one of them. The aim of this project is to build prefabricated and well-equipped kindergartens, which are earthquake-resistant, convenient and healthy with proper gardens, to increase the number of children who will benefit from early childhood education. This project also provides teacher, administrator and parent training on early childhood development (Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency, 2009/2010).

#### **2.4. Parental Involvement in Turkey**

As early childhood education is developing, the components which improve learning in this period also gain importance. Nowadays, the world is changing very fast; as a result, education systems and technologies are also developing rapidly. These changes cause a difference between present and past understanding of education. At this point what is needed is gain new information to keep up with new developments in the field. For parents, it is especially important to follow those developments in term of supporting their children’s academic life. To provide a solid ground for parental involvement, parental education emerges from the need of information about the changes in education

systems and technologies (Aslanargun, 2007). Parents as a component of education need to be trained, not only because of the need for trained parents for their children's education, but also because of the need for them to improve society (Kocabaş, 2005).

The concept of "parent training" may lead to an idea that parents are needed to be trained by teachers formally; however, the essential motivation underlying this training is to support children's' development through strengthening the families, reducing the negative behaviour of children and supporting society (Kocabaş, 2005). As listed under the heading of "Early Childhood Education in Turkey", quite many projects are ongoing, which focus on parental involvement. Mostly, the aim of training is to support the developments of children who are from disadvantaged environments and families by training their parents, especially mothers (Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency, 2009/2010).

In addition to parent trainings, there are some other parental involvement types supported by ministry regulations. As the main aspect of all those involvement regulations, school councils have an importance in school administration. These councils are formed by volunteer parents. According to the definition given by the National Ministry of Education (2012) the school council is a group gathered to maintain the link of school and family, to support the communication and cooperation between parents and school, to support the activities that facilitate education and teaching, to provide school-related needs of children, who cannot effort the expanses.

The duties of school councils are determined by the national Ministry of Education. These duties can be grouped as administrative duties, organizational duties and educational duties. Under administrative duties, "purchasing of goods and services for school needs, helping the tax payments and social security contributions for these services, "accepting and registering the donations as goods or cash, arranging social and cultural activities and campaigns, using the conditional donations according to their objectives", and "managing or finding someone to manage the school canteens and such" can be listed. In this way parents have a chance to be involved in the decision-making process if they are a member of the school councils.

Organizational duties cover "supporting sister schools and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds by cooperating with school administration"; "Cooperating with education- and teaching-related institutions and non-governmental organizations"; and "joining national and international projects and supporting to achieve objectives and

goals of these projects”. Finally educational duties can be summarized as “supporting the other activities related to education and teaching” and “contributing to the educational activities such as extra courses, exams, seminars, trips, art events, and such planned by school administration to increase students’ success”. These organizational and educational duties give parents the opportunity to be involved as volunteers if they work on the school council. (Detailed information about school council regulations is available in Appendix II)

Although school councils have a major role in the decision-making process in schools, it also has weak points. The parents who work on these councils mostly do not change until their children graduate and not all parents take a place on these councils. This may cause the other parents to be left out and turns into another level of administration rather than a parental involvement movement.

In addition to school council activities, there are parent meetings at least twice a year to inform parents about each student’s school performance. If a parent or teacher demands an individual meeting, it is arranged by the teacher at school by appointment.

## **2.5. Parental Involvement Types**

To be able to understand the level at which Turkish early childhood educators use parental involvement in their classrooms, parental involvement types are set according to the frameworks of parental involvement introduced by Epstein (2001). According to Epstein (2001), there are six frameworks of parental involvement. These are (a) parenting, which includes every kind of help to maintain home environments to support the child’s learning; (b) communicating, which is creating communication ways between home and school about the programs and child’s progress; (c) volunteering, which covers all activities done by parents voluntarily as support; (d) learning at home, which is providing the necessary information to parents about how to support the child’s learning at home; (e) decision making, which is including the parents in the decision-making process; and (f) collaborating in the community, which is finding out helpful resources and services from the community for school and families. The parental involvement classification of Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2007) was also useful to narrow and specify the parental involvement methods used in this research. According to Green et al., there are two sub-types of parental involvement, which are home-based and school-based. As understood from the names, home-based parental involvement covers all kinds of activities done by parents at home to support

their child's learning, while school-based refers to the activities done at school with parents.

In this research, with the help of the frameworks and sub-types of parental involvement described by Epstein (2001) and Green et al. (2007), four types of parental involvement are determined, which are communication, volunteer work, home support and decision making. These four types cover the general idea of parental involvement without dividing into more detailed types.

### **2.3.1. Communication**

This type of parental involvement is based on being in touch with parents to build an open line between school and house. It includes every kind of component necessary for communicating. According to Staples and Diliberto (2010), this is the basis of every other type of parental involvement. If only with healthy and well-structured communication, a high quality parental involvement programme can be established. It can be both a school-based and a home-based involvement type depending on which methods are used in the curriculum.

A well-structured communication system has daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly parent contacts, which can be both written or oral (Staples & Diliberto, 2010). As a sample of each contact, daily kept student diaries, weekly announced programs, monthly given newsletters, quarterly organized conferences and meetings can be listed. Phone calls, sending student portfolios, which contains student's work and photographs taken during the fieldtrips and classroom activities, for parents' review, and informing parents about the child's progress after school are also examples of this parental involvement type. (Epstein, 2001)

Although it seems like the easiest way of involving parents in their children's learning process, this framework can also be challenging. In a multicultural environment with parents with different socio-economic status, it can be hard to communicate clearly. For example, a parent who cannot speak a common language would be a major problem for the parental involving process. Additionally, keeping up with daily and weekly written communication methods can be troublesome for both teachers and parents since they are dealing with so many other matters at the same time (Epstein, 2001)

As positive results of this type of communication, parents gain a clear idea of school program and policies, follow their children's learning and development process and

have the chance of knowing children's problems quickly and find a solution with the teachers. Moreover, parents meet other parents and share their knowledge and experiences about child development and any other subject. On the teachers' side, it also has positive outcomes. For example, they learn more about home life, which helps them to know the children in depth. Communicating teachers also gain information about parents' view of school program and get a chance to develop them besides the program. Without doubt communication has a positive effect on children. Since parents and teachers know each other's movements, children would be in a consistent environment. (Epstein, 2001)

### **2.3.2. Volunteer Work**

Volunteer work can be considered as the sum of all kinds of works done by the parents for the school and program voluntarily. This type of parental involvement is mostly school-based, because it involves activities done by parents in the school or outdoors. (Green et al., (2007). As volunteer work, parents can show their special talents or hobbies in the classroom, present their profession to children, teach them new games or different activities. They can also help teachers while organizing and managing field trips or special occasions. Additionally, they can join some school-related activities and parties as guests.

Of course, this particular framework also has difficult matters to handle both for parents and teachers. For example, finding volunteers could be the hardest part of this parental involvement type since nowadays in almost all families both mothers and fathers are working; therefore, it could be quite impossible to take a day off and join a school activity. In this case the parents who join these activities would be the same ones every time. This situation would affect children negatively while pushing away working parents. To avoid this unwanted situation, a division of work should be made according to the free time and abilities of all parents. (Epstein, 2001) For example while a stay-home mother presents her hobby in the classroom; a working father can help the organization of a field trip at weekend.

This type of parental involvement gives the children awareness of many different subjects such as different hobbies, occupations, new games and activities. With the visits of parents, children also have a chance to develop new communication skills with adults. Furthermore, the positive effects on children, it also affects teachers and parents. First of all, with this type of parental involvement parents receive the message which

says that they are welcomed and valued at school. In this way they would develop self-confidence about working in the school with children and gain experience of volunteering. Parents learn the teachers' work and how it is to work at school. Finally, teachers learn the parents' interests and talents. While knowing the parents more deeply, they also obtain help from them during the activities, and with this help they could give more attention to students individually. (Epstein, 2001)

### **2.3.3. Home Support**

Home support basically covers the help from parents for curriculum-related work. The duty of teachers is giving ideas and information about what and how to support children at home (Epstein, 2001). Although Epstein considered curriculum-related activities done at school with parents as a part of learning at home, in this research home support is delimited by home-based activities the aim of which to support children's learning, and curriculum-related activities at school are covered by volunteer work.

There are many examples of this particular parental involvement type, such as helping children with their homework, doing activities given to support children's learning, preparing projects and presentations and focusing on specific subjects if the child needs some extra help. Even though this type of parental involvement does not require extra effort like volunteer work, it still has some hard points to deal with. According to Baker and Stevenson (1986), since parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds have barriers including long and inflexible working hours and lack of resources, they might not find enough the time and energy to help their children even at home. This situation makes those parents avoid school work.

Helping school work at home has positive outcomes for both teachers and parents while supporting children's learning. While supporting children's academic skills, parents have a chance to understand teachers' work and enjoy the time they spend with their children. In addition to supporting academic success, social skills are also encouraged through this type of parental involvement. For example, working on homework with parents helps to children gain positive attitudes towards school work, while developing curriculum-related skills. (Epstein, 2001)

### **2.3.4. Decision Making**

Involving parents in the decision-making process is the corner stone of the parental involvement process because as Stacey mentions, the core element of a successful

parent-school partnership is to maintain equal role taking in the process (as cited in Morrow & Malin, 2004). When parents have the chance to express their opinions about a subject, which is related to their children's school life, the bridge between home and school, which is oriented to support children's learning, would be built.

Setting up a council formed by parents would be a starting point to take parents' advice about activities and methods of how to deal with certain things. For example, preparing the lunch list with parents, asking their opinions about monthly themes or keeping in touch with them to know specific events that have occurred at home, which are needed to be mentioned at school would be samples of involving parents in decision-making process. (Epstein, 2001)

This parental involvement type is directly related with the status of parents because involving them in the decision-making process is collecting all kinds of ideas in the same pool. Considering parents from different cultural, socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, this pool is more likely to be the place where teachers find so many different opinions. In this case, coming to a conclusion is hard to deal with. (Epstein, 2001)

This type could be particularly harder than the other ways; however it gives the feeling of belongingness to parents and includes them in the curriculum. As a result, they learn more about educational policies and know that their opinions are appreciated. On the teachers' side, with this type of parental involvement they become more aware of parents' thoughts and ideas. (Epstein, 2001).

### **3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Since the aim of this study is to find out the general views of Turkish early childhood educators about parental involvement and their attitudes towards parental involvement types, there are three main question in this study, these are;

1. What do Turkish early childhood educators think about parental involvement?
2. What kind of attitudes do they have towards parental involvement types?
3. What are the reasons if they think it is hard to use a specific type of parental involvement?

Under these main questions there are four sub-research questions to gain a deeper understanding in the research area, and these are;

1. Is there a relationship between their teaching experience and their usage of parental involvement types?
2. Is there a relationship between their education level and their usage of parental involvement types?
3. Is there a relationship between their teaching experience and their opinions about parental involvement?
4. Is there a relationship between their education level and their opinions about parental involvement?

## **4. METHODS**

### **3.1. Participants**

113 early childhood educator who are working in Ankara the capital of Turkey participated in this research. All of the participants were women with a teaching experience of 1 year to 27 years in kindergarten classes of primary schools or preschools. 7 of them were teaching 0-3 year-olds, 38 of them were teaching 4-5 year-olds and 54 of them were teaching 6-7 year-olds while 11 of them were teaching mixed age groups. Most of the participants were graduated from a university's bachelor's degree program (n=92), and 11 of them were graduated from vocational high schools while 7 of them graduated from two-year programs of universities. Only 3 of them had a Master's degree while none of them had a PhD degree.

### **3.2. Procedures**

The questionnaire was prepared by the researcher to measure the attitudes of the early childhood educators towards parental involvement. First it was prepared in English to be able to present it, and then translated into Turkish by the researcher, who is a native Turkish speaker. To make the translation more reliable, another native Turkish speaker, who is also fluent in English, is asked to translate the questionnaire from English to Turkish again. At the end the translations were compared and there was no major difference between them, so researcher's translation is used.

For pretesting of the questionnaire, translated questionnaire was sent to ten Turkish early childhood educators who are currently working in Turkey via e-mail. According to feedbacks came from them, the questionnaire served the purpose and was successful to

measure desired aspects. Pretesting phase was completed in one month due to busy working plans of the participants.

Data collection phase started in the beginning of October with gathering the participants. After reaching 30 participants, the questionnaires are sent via e-mail. The response rate of the first wave was low (20%), therefore we decided to change our distribution method and started distributing the questionnaires by hand. Randomly chosen 30 schools in Ankara were visited and the research was explained to them. 25 of them agreed to let the questionnaires are distributed and all the teachers who work in these schools agreed to participate the study by filling the questionnaire (response rate 100%). The questionnaires were given to teachers (n=107) and after one week, the filled in questionnaires were collected from schools. As a result of leaving questionnaires in schools, the time participants spent on a questionnaire is not definite. On the other hand, according to participants of pre-test, expected time is about 15 minutes.

### **3.3. Measures**

The instrument of this research was questionnaires, which is formed by five parts and each part is to measure the attitudes of early childhood educators towards a specific type of parental involvement. At the beginning of the questionnaire the aim of the study was explained and on top of each part the focus of the relevant part was clarified. Besides all the questionnaires was anonymous due to the ethical concerns.

First part was “*General View*” which included nine questions and aimed to measure the general attitudes towards parental involvement in early childhood education. All questions were likert scale from 1; totally disagree to 5; totally agree.

Second part was “*Communication*” which consisted of seven questions and aimed to measure the frequency of using communication by early childhood educators as a parental involvement technique.

Third part of the questionnaire was “*Volunteer Works*” which had again seven questions and measures the frequency of involving parents as volunteers in the education process.

Forth part was “*Home Support*” which included six questions aiming to find out frequency of encouraging parents to support school activities at home as a type of parental involvement.

Fifth and last part was “*Decision Making*” which was formed by five questions focuses on the frequency of involving the parents in decision-making process as a type of parental involvement. For second, third, fourth and fifth parts, all the questions were likert scale with 1; never to 5; always, except 1 multiple choice question with an open ended choice available for each part.

### **3.4. Analysis:**

As the first step, in data entering process, negative items are converted. These are 6<sup>th</sup> (Educating is only teacher’s duty), 7<sup>th</sup> (Parents should not be involved in the education process, because they are not competent on this area) and 9<sup>th</sup> (Parent meetings organized twice a year are enough to inform them about children’s development) items, which are belong to general view part. To begin the analysis, reliability test was ran for all items in the questionnaire and it was found to be highly reliable (30 items;  $\alpha = .86$ ). Then it is repeated for each separated section, which are aiming to measure general views of teachers towards parental involvement (9 items), communication as a parental involvement method (6 items), involving parents as volunteers (6 items), using home support as parental involvement (5 items) and involving parents in decision-making process (4 items) . Cronbach’s alphas for these groups were .72, .74, .80, .78 and .85, respectively.

Secondly to make sure the items measure the same aspects, factor analysis were ran for each part separately. According to factor analysis results, only the first part of the questionnaire, which measures the general opinions of Turkish early childhood educators on parental involvement, has two groups. First group, which is formed by the first five items, measures the general understanding of parental involvement and second group, which is formed by last four items, focuses on the opinions about how parental involvement should be applied. Additionally the second part, which is volunteer work, also has two groups. First group, which is formed by first and last items, covers passive way of involving parents in volunteer works and the second group focuses on active volunteer works. Factor analysis results show that other three parts, which are communication, home support and decision making, have only one group for each, and this means that all items measures the same thing in those parts.

Spearman’s nonparametric correlations were used to test the relationship between teaching experiences of the participants and their general thoughts about parental involvement and the parental involvement methods they use; which are mentioned as

above; communication, home support, involving parents as volunteers and involving parents in decision-making process. Moreover, relationship between education levels of teachers and their general thoughts about parental involvement and the parental involvement methods they use is also tested with same way. Additionally Spearman's nonparametric correlations were used to see the relationship between parental involving methods listed above. Finally the correlation between the age group thought and the parental involvement methods used is tested by using Spearman's nonparametric correlations.

To understand which parental involvement is most and least used among Turkish early childhood educators, the descriptive statistics are checked and then frequency tests were ran for items under most and least popular types of parental involvement to find out which method is most and least used. In questionnaire, 16th, 23rd, 29th and 34th questions are designed as a multiple choice question with an open ended option available and it is wanted teachers to choose the reason if they think they do not use the parental involvement style efficiently or write it if it is different than the listed ones. Therefore to understand the reason behind the difficulties of using a specific parental involvement efficiently is tested by running frequency tests.

## 5. RESULTS

Firstly some descriptive statistics of the variables, which are used in the analysis of this research data, will be presented. Table 5.1.a gives the basic information of the mean values and standard deviations of the variables.

**Table 5.a Means and Standard Deviations of Parental Involvement Types**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
communication	112	11,00	30,00	21,0625	4,76716
volunteering	112	9,00	30,00	20,5625	5,22948
homesupport	110	9,00	25,00	21,3545	3,08767
decisionmaking	98	4,00	20,00	12,2857	4,24507
Valid N (listwise)	94				

From Table 5.a mean scores indicate that home support is the most used parental involvement styles among Turkish early childhood educators and it is follow closely by communication and volunteer works. The least used parental involvement technique is

decision making with  $M= 12$ , while the mean scores of other three techniques are pretty close to each other, which shows us involving parents in decision-making process is not common among Turkish early childhood teachers.

As second most common parental involvement type used among Turkish early childhood educators, communication is separated into two groups according to the methods. These groups are active communication methods and passive communication methods. As it is seen in Table 5.1.b oral communication methods ( $M= 11$ ) are slightly more common than written communication methods ( $M= 10$ ).

**Table 5.b Means and Standard Deviations of Communication Methods**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Oral Communication methods	113	7,00	15,00	11,3982	2,03777
Written Communication methods	112	3,00	15,00	9,6518	3,38175
Valid N (listwise)	112				

Involving parents as volunteers comes in third among parental involvement types. Factor analysis results show that there are two groups of item under volunteer works, which are active participation as volunteers and passive participation as volunteers.

### **5.1. General Views of Turkish Early Childhood Educators about Parental Involvement**

The first goal of this study was to investigate what Turkish early childhood educators think about parental involvement. Table 5.1.a shows the mean score of general view about parental involvement with minimum and maximum values. According to this mean score of General view ( $M= 34$ ) implies that most of the Turkish early childhood teachers who participated this study have a positive approach on parental involvement in general.

**Table 5. 1.a Mean and Standard Deviation of General Views of Turkish Early Childhood Educators**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
General view	103	15,00	43,00	33,9029	5,86868
Valid N (listwise)	103				

To find out the opinions of Turkish early childhood educators about whose duty is to build up a relationship between school and home, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> items are separately controlled. According to results shown in Table 5.1.b, there is no specific idea about this question since the mean scores are pretty much same ( $M_3= 4$ ,  $M_4=4$ ,  $M_5= 3$ ).

**Table 5.1.b Mean and Standard Deviation of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> items**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Building a relationship between educational institution and parents is teachers' duty.	110	1	5	3,69	1,029
Building a relationship between educational institution and parents is principals' duty.	109	1	5	3,54	1,102
Building a relationship between educational institution and parents is parents' duty.	111	1	5	3,34	1,140
Valid N (listwise)	108				

## **5.2. Attitudes of Turkish Early Childhood Educators Towards Parental Involvement and Its Types**

A Spearman's Rank Order correlation was run to determine the relationship between teachers' teaching experiences and their general views about parental involvement plus their usage of parental involvement types. There was no significant correlation found between teaching experience and general views ( $r = -.043$ ,  $P = .666$ ). As listed in the Table 5.2.a. Similarly there was no significant associations between teaching experience and any of parental involvement types ( $r_c = -.122$ ,  $P = .204$ ;  $r_v = .144$ ,  $P = .132$ ;  $r_h = -.142$ ,  $P = .141$ ;  $r_d = -.013$ ,  $P = .900$ )

**Table 5. 2.a Spearman's Rho Correlation Matrix of Teaching Experience and General View / Parental Involvement Types**

Measures	General view	Communication	Volunteering	Homesupport	Decisionmaking
Teaching Experience	-,043	-,122	,144	-,142	-,013

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

\*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

Another A Spearman's Rank Order correlation was run to find out the relationship between teachers' education levels and their general views about parental involvement and also their usage of parental involvement types. Results indicated that there is no significant association between teacher's education level and their general views about parental involvement ( $r = .023$ ,  $P = .816$ ). Also Table 5.2.b. shows that there is no significant correlation between education level of early childhood educators and any of the parental involvement types. ( $r_c = -.158$ ,  $P = .097$ ;  $r_v = .017$ ,  $P = .858$ ;  $r_h = .006$ ,  $P = .953$ ;  $r_d = -.027$ ,  $P = .791$ )

On the other hand, spearman's nonparametric correlations show that there are negative correlations between experience in the field and 6<sup>th</sup> (Educating is only teacher's duty), 7<sup>th</sup> (Parents should not be involved in the education process, because they are not competent on this area) items. ( $r_6 = -.216$ ,  $P = .023$ ;  $r_7 = -.241$ ,  $P = .011$ )

**Table 5.2.b Spearman's Rho Correlation Matrix of Education Level and General View / Parental Involvement Types**

Measures	General view	Communication	Volunteering	Homesupport	Decisionmaking
Education Level	,023	-,158	,017	,006	-,027

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

\*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

To investigate the correlation between the age group, which participants are teaching at the moment and parental involvement types they prefer, another Spearman's Rank Order correlation was run. According to test results shown in the Table 5.2.c, again there is no significant association between the age group, which teachers work with, and parental involvement types they use. ( $r_c = .041$ ,  $P = .670$ ;  $r_v = -.071$ ,  $P = .458$ ;  $r_h = -.023$ ,  $P = .808$ ;  $r_d = .104$ ,  $P = .309$ )

**Table 5. 2.c Spearman’s Rho Correlation Matrix of Age Group, which they are working with and General View / Parental Involvement Types**

Measure	Communication	Volunteering	Homesupport	Decisionmaking
Age group they are working with	,041	-,071	-,023	,104

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

\*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

The correlation between general views of Turkish early childhood educators and parental involvement types is checked by Spearman’s nonparametric correlations. According to these results, there is a significant relationship between general view of participants and involving parents in decision-making process ( $r = .249$ ,  $P = .018$ ). Additionally as seen on Table 5.2.d there is a strongly significant association between general view and usage of home support as a parental involvement type.

**Table 5.2.d Spearman’s Rho Correlation Matrix of General Viewpoints of Turkish Early Childhood Educators and Parental Involvement Types**

Measure	General View	Communication	Volunteer Work	Home Support	Desicion Making
General View	_____	,106	,120	,306**	,249*

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

\*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

Finally the relationships between parental involvement types are tested by Spearman's Rank Order correlation. Result indicates that parental involvement types are significantly related to each other.

Factor analysis results show that first part of the questionnaire measures two different dimensions of general opinions on parental involvement. While the first group measures the general idea about parental involvement, second group focuses on how it should be applied. To find out the relationship between these two groups with parental involvement types, another Spearman’s nonparametric correlations test was ran. In Table 5.2.e shows that while there is a significant correlation between general ideas and involving parents in decision-making process ( $r = .263$ ,  $P = .012$ ), there is no significant

association between general ideas and usage of home support as a parental involvement type.

**Table 5. 2.e Spearman's Rho Correlation Matrix of General Opinions on Parental Involvement, and Parental Involvement Types**

Measure	General Opinions				
	on parental involvement	communication	volunteering	homesupport	decisionmaking
General Opinions on Parental Involvement	—	,091	,144	,175	,263*

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

\*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

The association between second group, which measure the opinions of participants on how parental involvement should be applied, and parental involvement types is shown in Table 5.2.f and according to the results, there is a strongly significant relationship between the opinions of Turkish early childhood educators on how parental involvement should be applied and usage of home support as a parental involvement type ( $r = .300$ ,  $P = .002$ ).

**Table 5. 2.f Spearman's Rho Correlation Matrix Opinions of Turkish Early Childhood Educators on how parental involvement should be applied and Parental Involvement Types**

Measure	Opinions on how parental involvement should be applied				
	communication	volunteering	homesupport	decisionmaking	
Opinions on how parental involvement should be applied	—	,093	,025	,300**	,087

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

\*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

According to Table 5.2.g there is a significant positive relationship between communication and volunteer Works as parental involvement types ( $r = .209$ ,  $P = .028$ ). Additionally while there is a significant weak correlation between communication and home support ( $r = .197$ ,  $P = .040$ ) there is a significantly strong association between communication and decision making ( $r = .463$ ,  $P = .000$ ). Result also shows that there

are strongly significant correlations between volunteer works and both home support and decision making ( $r_h = .425, P = .000$ ;  $r_d = .428, P = .000$ ). Finally as seen in the Table 5.2.g. between home support and decision making, there is a significant strong positive correlation ( $r = .392, P = .000$ ).

**Table 5. 2.g Spearman's Rho Correlation Matrix of Parental Involvement Types**

Measure	Communication	Volunteering	Homesupport	Decisionmaking
Communication	—	,209*	,197*	,463**
Volunteering		—	,425**	,428**
Homesupport			—	,392**
Decisionmaking				—

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

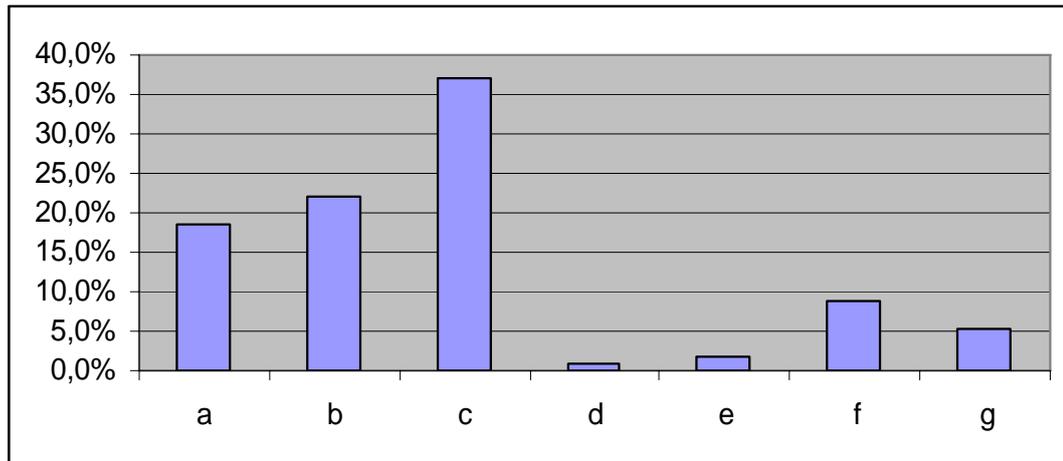
\*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

### 5.3 The Reasons Behind Inefficient Usage of Parental Involvement Types

To find out the most common reason behind the difficulties of using the specific parental types, frequency tests were ran. For each parental involvement types, a different frequency test was run and the results are as follows.

Result shows that 27% of the participants think that there is no problem using communication as a parental involvement type in their program. On the other hand 74% of them states that they do not think they use this type of parental involvement method. In Figure 5.4.a the percentages of the reasons why they think they cannot use communication efficiently.

**Figure 5.4.a Reasons why Early Childhood Educators Think That They Do Not Use Communication as Parental Involvement Type Efficiently**



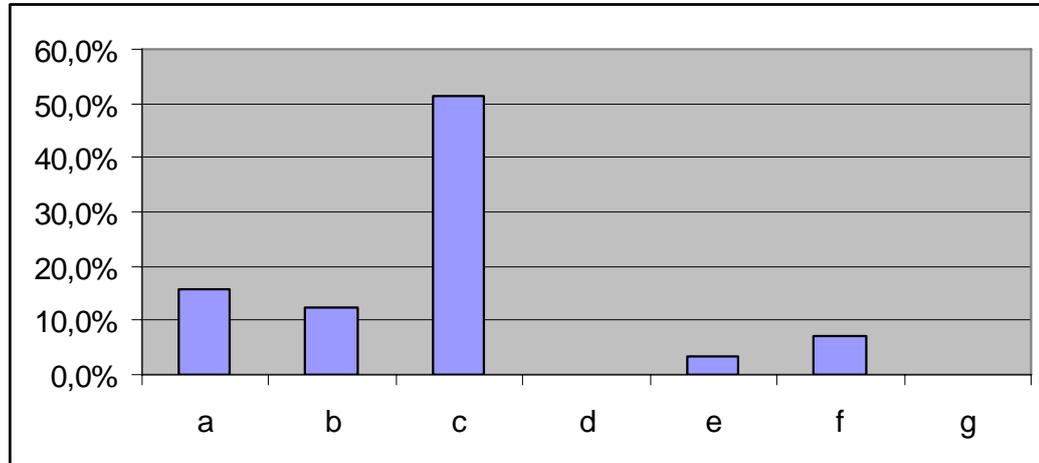
- a- "Turkish Education system is not suitable for using communication as a parental involvement type"  
 b- "Educational institution principals do not support educators for this type of parental involvement"  
 c- "Parents are not open to communication as a part of parental involvement"  
 d- "My education is not enough for using communication as a parental involvement"  
 e- "I do not believe that communication is an effective parental involvement type"  
 f- "Communication is hard to deal with as a parental involvement type"  
 g- "Other"

As shown in Figure 5.4.a "Turkish education system is not suitable for using communication as a parental involvement type" as the reason "a" constitutes 18.6% of the whole answers. While "Educational institution principals do not support educators for this type of parental involvement" as the reason "b" is 22.1% of the whole, the reason represented by "c", which stands for "Parents are not open to communication as a part of involvement" is 37,2% of the all answers. On the other hand results show that the reason "d", which is for "My education is not enough for using communication as a parental involvement type", has 0.9% of the whole answers among participants mention they have problems using this parental involvement type. Only 1.8% of the answers are for the reason "e", which stands for "I do not believe that communication is an effective parental involvement type". Finally 8,8% of answers point the reason "f", which is "Communication is hard to deal with as a parental involvement type", while 5,3% mentions there is another reason behind lack of using of this parental involvement type.

According to frequency results, while 21% of the participants think that using volunteer work as a parental involvement is not a problem for them, 79% of them think that they have problem to use this type of parental involvement efficiently. In Figure 5.4.b the

percentages of the reasons why they think they have problems to use volunteer work efficiently.

**Figure 5.4.b Reasons why Early Childhood Educators Think That They Do Not Use Volunteer Work as Parental Involvement Type Efficiently**



a- “Turkish Education system is not suitable for using volunteer work as a parental involvement type”

b- “Educational institution principals do not support educators for this type of parental involvement”

c- “Parents do not want to participate volunteer activities as a part of parental involvement”

d- “My education is not enough for using volunteer work as a parental involvement”

e- “I do not believe that volunteer works is effective as a parental involvement type”

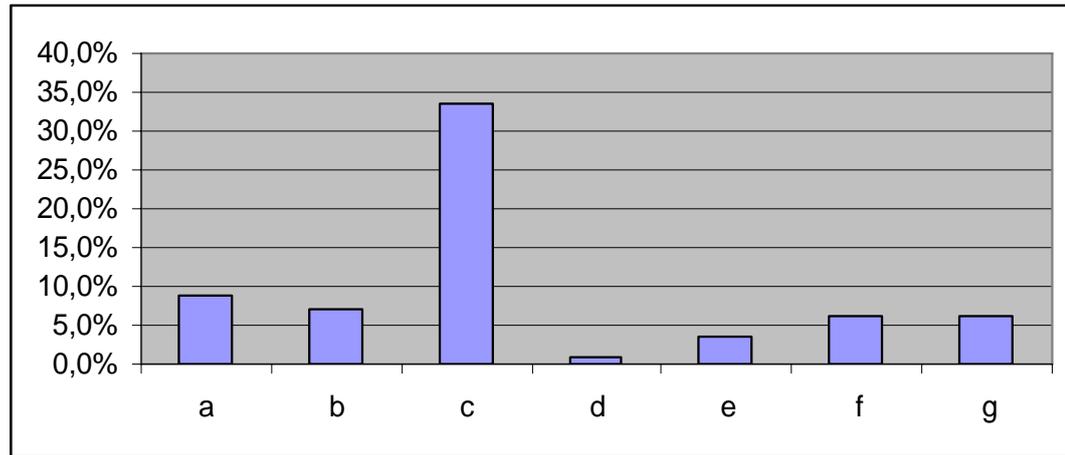
f- “Volunteer work is hard to deal with as a parental involvement type”

g- “Other”

As seen in Figure 5.4.b the reason “a”, which stands for “Turkish education system is not suitable for using volunteer work as a parental involvement type”, constitutes 15.9% of the whole answers. As the reason “b”; “Educational institution principals do not support educators for this type of parental involvement” is 12.4% of the whole, while the reason represented by “c”, which is “Parents do not want to participate volunteer work as a part of involvement” constitutes 51,3% of the all answers. Results show that the reason “e”, which stands for “I do not believe that volunteer works is effective as a parental involvement type”, has 3.5% of the whole answers among participants mention they have problems using this parental involvement type. 7.1% of the answers are for the reason “f”, which stands for “Volunteer work is hard to deal with as a parental involvement type”. Finally none of the participants give the reason “d”, which is “My education is not enough for using volunteer work as a parental involvement” and again none of them mention any other reasons for not using volunteer work efficiently as a parental involvement type.

For using home support as a parental involvement type, 45% of the participants do not think there is a problem while using this type. On the other hand 56% of them think they have problems. In the Figure 5.4.c the percentages of the reasons why they think that they have problems while using home support as a parental involvement type in their program.

**Figure 5.4.c Reasons why Early Childhood Educators Think That They Do Not Use Home Support as Parental Involvement Type Efficiently**



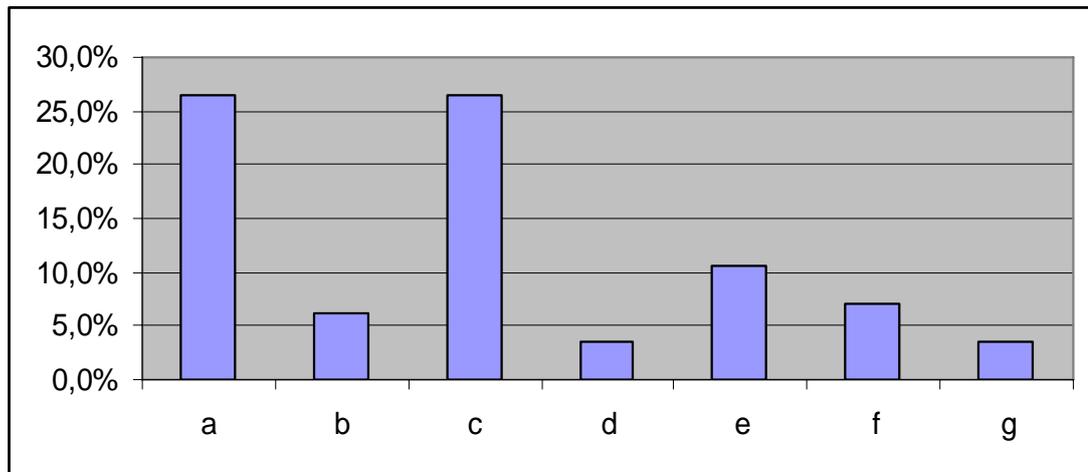
- a- "Turkish Education system is not suitable for using home support as a parental involvement type"
- b- "Educational institution principals do not support educators for this type of parental involvement"
- c- "Parents are not open to support school at home as a part of parental involvement"
- d- "My education is not enough for using home support as a parental involvement"
- e- "I do not believe that home support is an effective parental involvement type"
- f- "Home support is hard to deal with as a parental involvement type"
- g- "Other"

The reason "a", which stands for "Turkish education system is not suitable for using home support as a parental involvement type", covers 8.8% of the whole answers as shown in Figure 5.4.c. While the reason "b"; "Educational institution principals do not support educators for this type of parental involvement" is 7.1% of the whole, the reason listed as "c", which is "Parents are not open to support school at home as a part of parental involvement" constitutes 33,6% of the all answers. According to results that the reason "d", which is "My education is not enough for using home support as a parental involvement" is 0.9% and the reason "e", which stands for "I do not believe that home support is effective as a parental involvement type", has 3.5% of the whole answers among participants mention they have problems using this parental involvement type. Finally 6.2% of the answers are given for the reason "f", which stands for "Home support is hard to deal with as a parental involvement type" and 6.2%

of the answers gives other reasons for not using home support efficiently as a parental involvement type.

Lastly, results indicate that 35% of the participants state that they involve the parents in decision-making process without problem; however 65% of them indicate that they do not think they use this parental involvement type efficiently. In the Figure 5.4.d the percentages of the reasons why they think they cannot involve parents in decision-making process efficiently.

**Figure 5.4.d Reasons why Early Childhood Educators Think That They Do Not Involve Parents in Decision-making Process as Parental Involvement Type Efficiently**



- a- "Turkish Education system is not suitable for involving parents in decision-making process as a parental involvement type"
- b- "Educational institution principals do not support educators for this type of parental involvement"
- c- "Parents are not open to involve decision-making process as a part of parental involvement"
- d- "My education is not enough for involving parents in decision-making process as a parental involvement"
- e- "I do not believe that involving parents in decision-making process is an effective parental involvement type"
- f- "Involving parents in decision-making process is hard to deal with as a parental involvement type"
- g- "Other"

Figure 5.4.e shows that the reason "a", which is "Turkish education system is not suitable for involving parents in decision-making process as a parental involvement type", covers 26,5% of the whole answers. On the other hand the reason "b"; "Educational institution principals do not support educators for this type of parental involvement" is 6,2%, while the reason represented by "c", which is "Parents are not open to involve decision-making process as a part of parental involvement" constitutes 26,5% of the all answers. Results point that the reason "d", which stands for "My

education is not enough for involving parents in decision-making process as a parental involvement” constitutes 3,5% and the reason “e”; “I do not believe that involving parents in decision-making process is an effective parental involvement type”, covers 10,6% of the whole answers among participants. 7.1% of the answers is given for the reason “f”, which is “Involving parents in decision-making process is hard to deal with as a parental involvement type”. And finally 3.5% of the answers cover other reasons for not involving parents in decision-making process in a proper way as a parental involvement type.

## **6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

In this study, the main goal was to investigate the viewpoints of Turkish early childhood educators towards parental involvement and their usage of parental involvement types, which are specified in this piece of work as communication, involving parents as volunteers, using home support and involving parents in decision-making process (Epstein, 2001). The findings show that Turkish early childhood educators have a quite positive attitude towards parental involvement and they admit the importance of it in education. On the other hand they are not convinced of whose duty is to build a relationship between school and home. According to the answers given to these questions, they think that while teachers and principals are sharing the responsibility of parental involvement, parents have a passive role in this relationship. These results are similar to the findings of Swick and McKnight (1989). According to Swick and McKnight’s research (1989), kindergarten teachers are very supportive of parental involvement however they are not convinced of their obligation to carry it out.

To have a better understanding about Turkish early childhood educators’ view points on parental involvement, the relationship between teaching experience in the field and their opinions are investigated. Results show that there is no significant association between the years spent as an educator and views on parental involvement. The opinions about parental involvement are unrelated with the years spent as an early childhood educator. These results are shows similarities with the research conducted by Sabancı (2009), similar to this study his findings show that there is no significant relationship between work experience and attitudes on parental involvement. On the other hand, item based results point out a negative correlation with field experience in this study; however this relationship cannot be explained by educators’ experience in teaching.

To answer the second sub question, relationship between education levels of educators and their general views on parental involvement is investigated. Results show that there is no significant association between them, which means that whichever degree they have no relation with their understanding of parental involvement in early childhood education. However, Sabancı (2009) stated that there is a significant difference was found between academical backgrounds of teachers and their attitudes on parental involvement.

The second main purpose of this study was to find out the applications of parental involvement types among Turkish early childhood educators. Findings show that the most used parental involvement type is home support while the least used one is involving parents in decision-making process. These results also be supported by the study conducted by Sabancı (2009). According to his findings while principles have more positive attitudes towards communication, volunteering and decision making; teachers have more positive about learning at home as a parental involvement type. This may show that teachers leave these three parental involvement types to principles while they focus on using home support as a way of involving parents.

Oral and written methods for communication are separately investigated in this research and findings points that the usage of these two methods are slightly different. Turkish early childhood educators prefer oral communication methods somewhat more than written methods. It can be speculated that this difference is caused by the fact that written methods are more time consuming than the oral methods.

For deeper understanding on parental involvement types, the relationship between teaching experience and usage of parental involvement types also investigated. According to Spearman's nonparametric correlations test, there is no significant association between them. Additionally there is no significant correlation is found between educational background of Turkish early childhood educators and the types of parental involvement they use. Besides the age group they are working with also has no significant relationship with parental involvement types they used in their classrooms. On the other hand, the findings of previous research show that there is a difference between the associate degree graduates and others (Bachelor's and Master's degree) in terms of the parental involvement types teachers use (Sabancı, 2009). This difference might cause from the fact that Sabancı conducted his research on teachers with several different branches.

Furthermore, the relationship between general views of participants on parental involvement and the types of parental involvement they use is investigated. According to results, while what they think about parental involvement and how it should be has an association with how often they involve parents in decision-making process and use home support methods as a type of parental involvement, there is no relationship between their opinions on parental involvement and involving parents as volunteers and the usage of communication as a parental involvement type. In light of factor analysis results, two subgroups were found under general view about parental involvement. As listed before, these groups measure the general opinions on parental involvement and opinions on how parental involvement should be applied. Correlation results show that the opinions on how parental involvement should be in general have a relationship with involving parents in decision-making process. On the other hand, opinions on how parental involvement should be applied have a highly significant relationship with usage of home support as a type of parental involvement. The reason behind this association can also explain that home support is the most used parental involvement type. According to these results, Turkish early childhood educators may think learning at home is the type of parental involvement which meets the needs well.

Although there was no significant correlation between background variables and the usage of parental involvement types, there are strong associations between parental involvement types. Results point that all four of them significantly correlated to each other. Communication seems like the basis of other parental involvement types, since it correlates with the other parental involvement types. Turkish early childhood educators seem to use communication as a medium for parental involvement more than a type of parental involvement. The strong correlation between home support and volunteering can be explained by the statement that teachers may see home supporting activities as a kind of volunteering and connects these two types.

The most significant findings of this study was the reasons behind lack of efficient usage of parental involvement types because any studies about the reasons of lack of efficient usage of parental involvement types in Turkey among early childhood educators was not found. Frequency results show that most common reason is that early childhood educators do not think that parents want to be involved. On the other hand, the least voted reason is “my education is not enough to apply this type of parental involvement”. This shows that while self-esteem of early childhood educators is quite

high, they do not think that parents want to be a part of their children's education process.

Although home support is the most common parental involvement type among Turkish early childhood educators, 56% of the participants mentioned that they cannot use it efficiently. Again results show that they think they cannot use it mostly because parents do not want to support their children's learning at home. The second highest voted result for lack of efficient usage of home support is that early childhood educators think that the Turkish education system is not suitable for this type of parental involvement. Also they mention the educational and socioeconomic backgrounds of parents as a negative factor. According to the answers given for this question, parents, who are not well educated, have low self-esteem; therefore they prefer to not be involved in school-related subjects. Moreover, the families with low income may work long hours and physically harder, thus they may not have the energy to help their children at home. As Baker and Stevenson (1986) state that demographic characteristics of families affects the quality of parental involvement. While well-educated parents from high socioeconomic back grounds support their children's life through parental involvement activities, the ones with low education and income tend to avoid school-related activities.

74% of the participants think that they cannot use communication methods efficiently as a type of parental involvement. Again this time the most rated reason is that the parents do not want to be involved and it is followed by the reason "the principals do not support educators for this type of parental involvement". To communicate with parents and let them know about the development of the pupils, educators may need support from principals since while written communication methods take time, oral communication methods need technical support, such as phone in the classrooms. Swick and McKnight (1989) also mentions that the teachers, who are supportive of the parental involvement, related to administrative support. As Berger (2008) states that the school atmosphere is directly related to administrators' leadership style. This means that a supportive and positive attitude of principals would affect the teachers and the parents in terms of maintaining a healthy relationship. Participants also mentions that these methods are time consuming for parents as well as for them, therefore they do not response the letters they send or they do not talk to educators long enough to learn every progress their child have.

Volunteer work is the most voted type of parental involvement, which early childhood educators have trouble with handling it. While only 21% of the participants think they can use volunteer work efficiently, 79% of them state that it is hard to apply volunteer work as a type of parental involvement. Among the ones who think they have problems with this type of parental involvement, again the most rated reason was “parents do not want to be involved”. Although most of them mentioned that they like to use this type of parental involvement, they state that the Turkish education system is not suitable for this, while they also think principals are not supportive about it. Involving parents as volunteers is a challenging type of parental involvement (Epstein, 2001). First of all parents need to find enough free time to do volunteer work, at this point finding suitable duties for parents becomes important, which brings the study of Baker and Stevenson (1986), as they state socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds of parents shape the way involve in their children’s education.

Decision making seemed like the most problematic issue at the beginning, however according to results it is comes third among the other types of parental involvement. This might be caused by the missing data, since this part of the questionnaire has the most unanswered questions. Despite of the missing data, results show that 65% of the participants think that they cannot involve parents in decision-making process and almost 27% of the answers points out the reasons; “parents do not want to be involved” and “the Turkish education system is not suitable for this type of parental involvement”. As mentioned before, school councils are almost the only way to be a part decision-making process for parents; this explains why educators think one of the biggest reasons is that the Turkish education system is not suitable. On the other hand as long as the principals recognize the importance of a well-structured collaboration between school and home, and give teachers the autonomy of working with parents and involving them in decision-making process, the schools would maintain an effective programme of parental involvement (Berger, 2008). Besides these reasons, educators also think that involving parents in decision-making process may cause many conflicts among parents and may affect the process negatively. Since there are so many parents from different backgrounds they think it is hard to have a common decision. Probably that is also why they do not think involving parents in decision-making process is an effective parental involvement type. Also parents’ demographic characteristics come to prominence since educators think decision-making is a sensitive issue.

## 7. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Parental involvement plays a great role in education despite of the age of the pupils. The cooperation between home and school creates a mutual environment, where the strengths of the home and the expertise of educational institution meets. Educating a pupil without concerning the family and the home environment is impossible since the home is where the child is socialized into life. As a result involving parents in education programme gives the opportunity to reach pupils full potential. (Berger, 2008)

No doubt, involving parents in the education programme is a tricky issue. With all demographic differences, past experiences, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, the attitudes of parents vary. As Berger (2008) mentions there are mainly five different types of parents, who behave differently in terms of being involved in their children's education. As mentioned before, the writer of this thesis has work experience in early childhood education and working at a preschool gives the chance to observe different aspects of parental involvement. Furthermore, working specifically at an international preschool gave the opportunity to see these parental attitudes very closely from the eyes of a teacher as well as an administrative staff.

Parent attitudes are shaped according to their current situations as well as their past and these attitudes can be listed as a scale from a total avoidance to overly activeness. Between of these two extreme groups, there are parents who need be encouraged for parental involvement, parents who are ready to involve when they are called and parents who enjoy involving in school (Berger, 2008). According to parent responses, the attitudes of teachers also change. For example, in the light of observations done by the writer during her work, teachers tend to avoid discussing with overly active parents, who enjoy the power over school and teachers, since they think it is hard to please them and facing with them makes teachers uncomfortable and underestimated. Besides, the relationship between teachers and the parents who avoid school-related subjects also gives them similar feelings, because they have problem with maintaining a consistent environment for pupils.

The results of this study show that the most common parental involvement type among Turkish early childhood educators is home support. Also writers work experience shows that giving simple homework and activity ideas, which parents and children can do at home is well used, on the other hand sometimes these suggestions can be ignored due to workload of parents. As a result, this type of parental involvement may fail. According

to study results, secondly most used parental involvement is communication. Personal experiences also support this result, however the content of these communications may worth to mention. For every teacher, keeping individual journals for each pupil was compulsory in this particular educational institution. The idea of these journals is to keep posting information about the classroom activities, pupil's daily performance and development and giving brief information about the next day. This information includes, nurturing progress as well as educational outcomes. In the other side, due to crowded classrooms and loaded daily programme, teachers have problems to keep up writing valuable information and it turned to a repetitive blogs instead of individual information. While written communication methods is problematic, oral communication methods works more accurately, when teachers have the chance to talk to parents.

Frequency results of involving parents in decision-making process as a type of parental involvement is quite consistent with what was expected based on past experiences. According to results, decision making comes late among all parental involvement types. The reason of this situation may be caused by how education system works in Turkey. Even though this particular educational institution applying English education system and it is an international school, still the programme carries the effects of Turkish system. The programme of the year is prepared before the education period starts, all the subjects and school trips are defined in the same way with other educational institutions in Turkey. As a result of this pre-preparation, involving parents in decision-making process is not possible. On the other hand deciding the activities throughout the year, depending on teachers, parents can be involved in.

The relationships between parental involvement and background variables such as educators' educational level, teaching experience were the main concern of this study. Results show no association between any of these variables and they are also consistent with past experiences of the writer. They were all eager for parental involvement, however they had biases against parents and need help in terms of coping with problems. Especially need of support from administration was the most important of all since teachers who work in a private kindergartens have the feeling of being scared of parents since they think if they disagree with parents, their job will be in danger.

Besides of support from principal, teachers also need certain education about parental involvement and its types. Swick and McKnight (1989) state that while the programme

and administration are encouraging, supporting and rewarding teachers for involving parents, there should be an initial training about parental involvement.

Last of all, although past experiences in the field are consistent with the results of this study, they also show that due to the complex structure of the Turkish early childhood education system, there can be more details, which affects the general frame of the subject. Without doubt, early childhood educators are very aware of the importance of the parental involvement in development of pupils, they still need more support from administrations, and system itself. On the other hand teacher trainings would not be enough since this issue is mutual. Trainings organized by the educational institutions with the help of ministry regulations for both teachers and parents would more likely meet the needs of both sides.

## **8. LIMITATIONS**

Since the questionnaire prepared by the researcher, although it was found highly reliable, with another questionnaire prepared by an experienced researcher, the results could be different. Additionally the translation of the questionnaire might be a problem, because it is first prepared in English to be able to get the necessary feedback from the supervisors of the study. Even though translation is done for the second time by another person, both researcher and the supporting person are neither native English speaker nor professional translator.

During the data collecting process, there are also some limitations. For example the researcher did not wait until the participants filled in the questionnaire; instead she gave the questionnaires and after one week, visited the schools where participants work to collect the sheets back. Because of this method, although the questionnaires explained by the researcher when they are handed, if participants had further questions about them, they could not find the opportunity to get those answers. This also might explain some of the missing data.

## **9. FURTHER STUDIES**

In this research, teachers' viewpoints and attitudes are chosen as focus, for further research parents' views and attitudes could be studied, since according to the results of this work, some of the teachers put the blame on parents at the point they think a specific parental involvement method is not used efficiently. At that point it would be

interesting to see what parents think about it and what the real reason is, if those particular methods are not applied efficiently.

As another window through parental involvement, father involvement can be investigated, since parental involvement mostly considered as the involvement of mothers.

Additionally participants in this study were chosen from the schools, in which mostly middle-class students are educated. As a result of this, this research shows a general picture about the subject. On the other hand, to compare the situations about parental involvement in schools, which are from different socioeconomic backgrounds, would be useful for the literature, because according to Baker and Stevenson (1986) socioeconomic status has an impact on parental involvement applications and levels. In this case comparing public schools and private school would be efficient.

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**APPENDIX 1**

*This questionnaire is prepared to obtain the data for the master's thesis of a master's degree student at University of Turku. The aim of this research is to understand the similarities and differences between Turkish and Finnish early childhood educators' opinions about parental involvement and their attitudes.*

*This questionnaire is in five sections and each section has a different purpose and explanations of purposes are located at the top of each section. Please read the explanations carefully and mark the number which reflects your opinion best.*

**General Information:**

Gender:

Graduation Year:

Experience at teaching position:

Level of study:

Vocational High school  University  Master's degree  Other....(please specify)

Age group of children:

0-3 year-olds

4-5 year-olds

6-7 year olds

Mixed-age group

**Section 1.** *The purpose of this section is to find out the general views about parental involvement in early childhood education institutions. Please fill in the circle of the number which reflects your idea best.*

**Totally Agree ⑤, Agree ④, Barely Agree ③, Disagree ②, Totally Disagree ①**

1. Parental involvement plays an important role in students' success.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2. Educational institutions should have an open door policy for parents.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3. Building a relationship between the educational institution and parents is the teachers' duty.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4. Building a relationship between the educational institution and parents is the principal's duty.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5. Building a relationship between the educational institution and the parents is parents' duty.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6. Educating is only the teacher's duty	①	②	③	④	⑤
7. Parents should not be involved in the education process because they are not competent on this area	①	②	③	④	⑤
8. Parents and teachers should work as a team	①	②	③	④	⑤
9. Parent meetings organized twice a year are enough to inform them about children's development	①	②	③	④	⑤

**Section 2.** *The purpose of this section is to find out the frequency of communication usage as a type of parental involvement in early childhood education institutions. Please fill in the circle of the number which reflects your idea best.*

### Communication

**Always ⑤, Often ④, Sometimes ③, Rarely ②, Never ①**

10. I phone parents and talk to them about their child's development.	①	②	③	④	⑤
11. I talk to parents face to face to discuss their child's development.	①	②	③	④	⑤
12. If the pupil does not come to the educational institution, same day I phone the parent to ask about the student.	①	②	③	④	⑤
13. I share my weekly/monthly activity plans with parents.	①	②	③	④	⑤
14. I write journals for each student to inform parents about students' daily performance at the educational institution.	①	②	③	④	⑤
15. I prepare and send to parents monthly newsletters about trips, project works and topics that we have focused on.	①	②	③	④	⑤

16. If you think that it is hard to use communication efficiently as a parental involvement, the reason is...

- Our education system is not suitable for this
- Educational institution principals do not support teachers for this
- Parents do not want to be involved
- My education is not enough for this
- I do not believe the benefits of parental involvement
- Parental involvement is hard to deal with.
- Other (please specify):.....

**Section 3.** *The purpose of this section is to find out the frequency of involving parents as volunteers in early childhood education institutions. Please fill in the circle of the number which reflects your idea best.*

### Volunteering

Always ⑤, Often ④, Sometimes ③, Rarely ②, Never ①

17. I invite parents on excursions	①	②	③	④	⑤
18. I invite parents into classroom and want them to join classroom activities with their child.	①	②	③	④	⑤
19. I invite parents into classroom and want them to present their hobbies.	①	②	③	④	⑤
20. I invite parents into classroom and want them to present their work.	①	②	③	④	⑤
21. I invite parents into classroom and want them to teach a game to the students.	①	②	③	④	⑤
22. I invite parents to classroom parties/ students' birthday parties	①	②	③	④	⑤

23. If you think that it is hard to involve parents as volunteers efficiently, the reason is...

- Our education system is not suitable for this
- Educational institution principals do not support teachers for this
- Parents do not want to be involved
- My education is not enough for this
- I do not believe the benefits of parental involvement
- Parental involvement is hard to deal with.
- Other (please specify):.....

**Section 4.** *The purpose of this section is to find out the frequency of encouraging parents to support school activities at home as a type of parental involvement in early childhood education institutions. Please fill in the circle of the number which reflects your idea best.*

**Home support**

**Always ⑤, Often ④, Sometimes ③, Rarely ②, Never ①**

24. I give home activity ideas that support the educational institution activities to parents.	①	②	③	④	⑤
25. I give simple homework to students which they can do with their parents.	①	②	③	④	⑤
26. I encourage parents to talk to their children about what they did during the day.	①	②	③	④	⑤
27. I want parents to help their children on subjects which they have trouble at educational institution.	①	②	③	④	⑤
28. I want parents to play the games at home which we play at educational institution.	①	②	③	④	⑤

29. If you think that it is hard to encourage parents to support classroom activities efficiently, the reason is...

- Our education system is not suitable for this
- Educational institution principals do not support teachers for this
- Parents do not want to be involved
- My education is not enough for this
- I do not believe the benefits of parental involvement
- Parental involvement is hard to deal with.
- Other (please specify):.....

**Section 5.** *The purpose of this section is to find out the frequency of involving the parents decision- making process as a type of parental involvement in early childhood education institutions. Please fill in the circle of the number which reflects your idea best.*

### Decision Making

**Always ⑤, Often ④, Sometimes ③, Rarely ②, Never ①**

30. I ask parents' opinions about planning trips.	①	②	③	④	⑤
31. I ask parents' opinions about the classroom activities and topics that I am planning.	①	②	③	④	⑤
32. I ask parents' opinions about monthly lunch menus.	①	②	③	④	⑤
33. I ask parents' opinions about deciding discipline measure for pupils.	①	②	③	④	⑤

34. If you think that it is hard to involve parents into decision-making process efficiently, the reason is...

- Our education system is not suitable for this
- Educational institution principals do not support teachers for this
- Parents do not want to be involved
- My education is not enough for this
- I do not believe the benefits of parental involvement
- Parental involvement is hard to deal with.
- Other (please specify):.....

## APPENDIX II

The duties of school councils are determined by the National Ministry of Education:

- ❖ Cooperating with parents, school administration and teachers to raise students with the basic principles, general and specific objectives of the Turkish national education system and with the national spiritual values.
- ❖ Supporting to achieve school's objectives and goals, supporting school's strategic plans for academic quality and success, providing an equal environment for all students and cooperating with parents to help applying the decisions held in teacher council.
- ❖ Contributing the educational activities such as extra courses, exams, seminars, trips, art events, and such planned by school administration to increase students' success.
- ❖ Contributing to find a good way to use school properties such as classrooms, laboratories, library, gymnasium and workshops out of school time.
- ❖ Purchasing of goods and services for school needs, helping the tax payments and social security contributions of these services.
- ❖ Contributing of preparation costs of national holidays, special day and weeks, and cultural competitions.
- ❖ Accepting and registering the donations as good or cash, arranging social and cultural activities and campaigns, using the conditional donations according to their objectives.
- ❖ Managing or finding someone to manage the school canteens and such.
- ❖ Supporting the sister schools and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds by cooperating with school administration.
- ❖ Cooperating with the education and teaching related institutions and non-governmental organizations.
- ❖ Contributing the councils gathers to improve education and teaching.
- ❖ Joining national and international projects and supporting to achieve objectives and goals of these projects.
- ❖ Supporting the other activities related to education and teaching.

(as cited in School Council Regulations, 2012)